Interpretation, Narration and Display of East Asian Collections: An Analysis of Irish Museum Approaches

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I confirm that the word count of this thesis is less than 100,000 words excluding the title page, contents, acknowledgements, abstract, abbreviations, illustrations, tables, appendices and bibliography

Abstract

The interpretation, narration and display of East Asian collections shapes how they are perceived, understood and recalled by the museum visitor. In particular, these elements play a significant role in determining what objects are seen to represent and signify in the museum space. This thesis employs a multidisciplinary approach to explore and analyse the role of interpretation in the display of East Asian collections in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, focussing on four prominent East Asian collections. To date the study of museum narrative has been limited, the study of the display of East Asian collections in the context of Ireland is also an inadequately researched area. Museum display strategies are increasingly significant for East Asian collections in the West today, as interpretation and display practices largely define the community relations, cultural understanding, social value and identity representations made through objects. An examination of current displays therefore determines a broad picture of the representation of East Asian history, culture and identity in museums in Ireland.

This thesis is divided into two sections. Section One focusses on museum display, this establishes an overview of the interpretation and narration approaches in operation for the four case study collections. It offers an examination of the social, cultural and political ideologies underpinning the narration of East Asian collections in Irish museums. Contributing original and significant knowledge to debates surrounding the role of interpretation in twenty-first century museum practice. The focus of Section Two is museum objects, here emphasis is placed on the contexts and storylines currently disregarded in existing display strategies. It makes a significant contribution to museum theory and practice, by providing an understanding of museum interpretation and its influence on themes such as inclusion and representation. Further advancing the depiction of multiple stories, identities and contexts in the museum display environment. The findings from this thesis provide direction for how museum interpretation and display practices can be used for the representation of multiple stories and identities, making previously overlooked contexts visible, and for building cross-cultural relationships and understanding.

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List of Abbreviations

CAA	Contemporary Applied Arts
CBL	Chester Beatty Library
EU	European Union
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
ICOM	International Council of Museums
MEAA	Museum of East Asian Art
NEMO	Network of European Museum Organisations
NMI	National Museum of Ireland
QR	Quick Response
RH	Relative Humidity
UNSD	The United Nations Statistics Division
UV	Ultraviolet
VET	Vocational and Educational Training

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Chapter One
Introduction: Research Aim, Objectives, Rationale and Methods.

The collection, interpretation and display of East Asian objects is central to how they are perceived, understood and recalled by the museum visitor. Western museums, as custodians and disseminators of knowledge, have been and are complicit in the creation of images of East Asia. Accordingly, Clunas (1998: 41) asserts that in the West 'the displays of the major public museums, are the principal visible constructions from which a discourse of Chinese culture can be derived'. In light of this, the work undertaken in this project examines the social, cultural and political ideologies underpinning the narration of East Asian collections in Irish museums which has to date been largely overlooked. Advancing a better understanding of the various principles, ideas and aspects of history embedded in displays, and establishing a broad picture of the representation of East Asian culture in museums in Ireland, this chapter suggests it is necessary to re-evaluate and reconfigure systems of interpretation, narration and display. The research was completed by exploring four prominent East Asian collections on the island of Ireland (encompassing both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland): the *Albert Bender Collection of Asian Art* in the National Museum of Ireland (NMI), Dublin; the East Asian collections of the Chester Beatty Library (CBL), Dublin; the *O'Neill Collection of Chinese Ceramics* in the Ulster Museum, Belfast; and the East Asian collection in the Hunt Museum, Limerick.

Although contributions to the field provided by Tythacott (2011a), Whitty (2011), Barnes (2016) and Pierson (2017a) have been significant in exploring the biographies of collectors and the histories of East Asian collections in Britain, relatively little museological analysis on the particular issues associated with the representation and display of East Asian objects has been published to date. This research therefore contributes original and significant knowledge to debates surrounding the role of interpretation in twenty-first century museum practice. By employing a range of research methodologies, both primary (archive material and interviews) and secondary (theoretical frameworks that draw on museum studies, art history, cultural sociology), it explores and analyses the role of interpretation and

narration in the exhibition of East Asian collections in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. As such it is based on the premise that social, cultural and political contexts are manifest in museum narration and display practices, which belong to a wider culture of image-making. The four collections explored were selected as they are each prominent assemblages of East Asian art and artefacts throughout the island of Ireland, each receiving vast numbers of visitors each year, making the narratives and contexts depicted in each display even more prevalent as they are prominently in the public eye. The four collections also share many similarities and are comparable in many ways, making them thought-provoking as a group of case studies that together show the history of the collection of East Asian objects in Ireland during the early twentieth century.

In accordance with the United Nations Statistics Division definition of East Asia (UNSD 2018), this project explores the display of cultural artefacts from China, Japan, Tibet, Korea and Taiwan held in Irish collections. The term East Asia was selected for use in this thesis as it is widely employed in museum spaces in the West when displaying and classifying objects from the previously mentioned geographic locations. Not only is this term used in the display and classification of the four museum collections explored in this thesis, but also in the museum sector in Britain and Ireland more broadly, with the Museum of East Asian Art (MEAA) in Bath largely acknowledged as a specialist in this area. However, East Asia as a geographic and political entity is diverse, encompassing many distinct cultural identities and geographic locations in one term, therefore its culture cannot be condensed into a single homogenous identity. In exploring East Asian artefacts this research defines and addresses the use of narrative in contemporary museum display practices, and explores the changing and increasingly prominent usage of the term in surrounding museum studies literature. The various complex strands of museum narrative are unravelled by exploring how museum visitors experience museums as narratives, and how museum professionals utilise narrative to interpret collections. Correspondingly this research explores a significant topic in today's cosmopolitan, pluralistic and multicultural societies, by examining the dangers of collapsing a range of objects from a wide spread of geographical locations into single identity representations. Greater consideration of diversity issues in the presentation and interpretation of museum collections has become a vital aspect of museum practice.

The lack of such approaches in museum exhibits encourages ethnocentric exhibition narratives, reinforcing the social issue of racial marginalisation.

The findings from this research thus make a significant contribution to museum theory and practice (specifically Irish museums), by providing a better understanding of museum narration and its influence on themes such as inclusion and representation. This advanced the depiction of multiple stories (narratives), identities and contexts in the museum display environment.

Research Aim and Objectives

Given the context described above, the aim of this thesis is to examine the social, cultural and political ideologies underpinning the interpretation, narration and display of East Asian collections in museums in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Research Objectives

1. To explore how the display of objects in museums affects visitor perceptions of them. Relating to debates surrounding identity construction and audience engagement through museum objects.

2. To interrogate the uses and understandings of East Asian collections in museum spaces in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Exploring both the functions of such collections alongside the challenges faced by museums.

3. To illustrate how narratives in the museum space are constructed. Unfolding the display strategies and interpretations currently enforced in each case study, and through this determining which aspects of the social, cultural and political history of the collections are revealed, and which are overlooked.

4. To contribute to museum theory and practice by advancing an understanding of the interpretation and display of East Asian collections in Western museum spaces. Providing further insight into how multiple stories and identities can be approached in such displays.

Interdisciplinary Methodologies

In order to conduct this research interdisciplinary methodologies are utilised between three distinct disciplines: museum studies, cultural sociology and art history. Museum studies allows for the examination of museum operation. It supports the exploration and interpretation and narration methods commonly used by museum professionals when displaying East Asian objects in Western museum spaces, focussing on museums in Ireland. Cultural sociology underpins the examination of how museum visitors interact with the narratives at play. In particular exploring how representative these narratives are to a wide diversity of cultural identities; this will largely be deciphered through a series of interviews. Art history informs the investigation of objects in each collection, through visual analysis and historical/biographical research regarding individual objects. This unfolds the diversity of existent narratives embodied by the collections, allowing the objects in the collections to become an equally important aspect of the research conducted.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Theoretical Framework

By exhibiting select assemblages of objects alongside interpretative aids (primarily text panels and labels), museums commonly communicate constructed master narratives. These narratives depict shared assumptions of reality. Accordingly, this research adopts social constructionism in order to reveal these socially created museum narratives. Social constructionism asks for a critical stance toward accepted ways of understanding the world (Burr 2003: 2). From this stance, it can be argued that the categories and classifications employed by museums are historically and culturally specific. A social constructionist framework assists in analysing the social, cultural and political ideologies underpinning the interpretative structures, display strategies and meta-narratives promoted by museums. A constructionist framework also aids in critically analysing the constructed portrayal of East Asia in museum spaces in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Moreover, the methodological approach employed in this research is qualitative and thus analogous to its overarching social constructionist epistemology.

Constructionism is the view that all knowledge ‘is contingent upon human practices’, therefore that reality is constructed through interaction between human beings and their world (Crotty 1998: 42). In relation to museum objects, meaning consequently does not exist in in the object waiting to be discovered, instead it is constructed. Objects may be charged with potential meaning, but actual meaning only emerges through human interaction (Crotty 1998: 42). Social constructionism concerns how an object is perceived by society. Through a constructionist lens, objects become something that can be understood by humans only because they have been made by humans (Burr 2003: 15). In light of this social constructionism can be defined as the ‘collective generation of meaning’, which emphasises how the culture and society which we belong to shapes the way we see things (Crotty 1998: 42).

Accordingly, social constructionism contends that knowledge and meaning are dependent upon history, society and culture. Meaning-making is embedded within socio-cultural processes. We depend on culture and society ‘to direct our behaviour and organise our experience’, also affecting our construction of knowledge and value (Burr 2003: 24). In regard to the museum, social constructionism enforces that museum classifications do not necessarily refer to real divisions. Museum classifications can therefore be perceived as products of culture, and also as reflections of the social perspectives in which they were constructed. The ways we understand the world therefore depend on prevailing social and economic arrangements, and are bound to the power relations in a culture at that time (Burr 2003: 24). Consequently, social constructionism is suspicious of how the world appears to be, and recognises that at different times and in different places there have been very different interpretations of the same phenomena (Burr 2003: 24); which in this case can be applied to interpretations of objects and collections.

Individuals from differing social and cultural backgrounds, may well have different ways of knowing and understanding. At its most extreme social constructionism denies that knowledge directly reflects reality, and likewise sees facts to be impartial. Knowledge and fact are ‘always the product of someone asking a particular question’, and ‘always derive from assumptions about the world’ (Burr 2003: 172). For museums, this means that interpretation decisions, narration methods and display practices are always both the result and reflection of individual, social or

cultural traits. Such practices therefore cannot be seen to straightforwardly represent reality. Subsequently, a social constructionist framework aids this investigation in deciphering how social, cultural and political ideologies have impacted the interpretations and displays museums communicate.

Research Methods

Qualitative research seeks to contribute to a better understanding of social realities, and to draw attention to processes, meaning patterns and structural features (Flick, Kardorff and Steinke 2004: 3). Consequently, in qualitative research reality is seen to be created through social interaction (Flick, Kardorff and Steinke 2004: 6). A qualitative approach promoted a better understanding of the social and cultural aspects of museum collections, and of the processes and patterns utilised by museums in interpreting and displaying these collections. Moreover, it has advanced further insight into the social interaction between museum collections and visitors, and the meaning-making processes constructed from these experiences. Qualitative research is frequently employed when we wish to empower individuals, to share their versions of stories (Creswell 2007: 40). This corresponds with the focus of this project: to explore the narratives and interpretations surrounding exhibitions of East Asian material culture, and to decipher which narratives have been disregarded in these displays. Hence it is hoped that this body of research will give voice to the counter narratives absent in museums, and will advance the expression of individuals who maybe do not feel that they are being sufficiently represented by the museum's interpretative strategies. Congruently, the goal of qualitative research is to 'develop the new' (Flick 2014: 33), and fittingly this project aims to progress new engaging approaches to museum narration.

Case Study Research

The essence of a case study is that it tries to illuminate a set of decisions, 'why they were taken, how they were implemented and with what result' (Yin 2003: 12). This research project addresses why museum collections have been interpreted in certain ways; what these interpretation and display strategies are for East Asian collections on the island of Ireland; and, what the result of this is for representation and narration practices. In order to qualify as a case study, it must be possible to place

the study into a ‘larger context’ (Gerring 2017: 30). Four museum collections are regarded as individual cases in this research project. However, each of the cases emblematises a larger account of the representation of East Asia in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, and will be harnessed to suggest a means for greater understanding between communities. These cases are accordingly utilised as what Stake (2005: 445) labels ‘instrumental case studies’. This type of enquiry is implemented when a case or set of cases are examined in order to provide insight into a broader issue. However, in this model each case is still explored in depth, as this helps to examine the ‘external interest’ (Stake 2005: 445). How each case study was examined will next be discussed, through a comprehensive account of the research methods that were employed.

A Review of Existing Literature

A systematic literature review has been carried out. It explores the research to date surrounding four imperative strands of interest in this research project: East Asian collections in Ireland, relations between East Asia and the West, museums and identity, and museum narrative. The outcome of this review is communicated in Chapter Two.

Desk-Based Research

Written documents such as newspaper reports, exhibition catalogues and archived materials provided a useful source; as identified by Yin (2003: 86) textual sources and archived materials hold their strengths in the fact that they could be reviewed repeatedly, and that they contain precise names and dates. When reviewing textual sources, I was mindful that these sources were written for a specific purpose and for a specific audience, and I became the ‘vicarious observer’, by ‘observing communications among other parties’ in the documents examined (Yin 2014: 108). For this reason, even though textual sources are an important means of data collection, how they have been assembled, used, and how they function in ‘episodes of interaction’ has been taken into consideration (Prior 2011: 107).

Interviews: The Interview Approach Taken

Interviewing is the most common method of data collection in qualitative research (King and Horrocks 2010: 1). Interview research is usually employed when the

researcher aims to ‘understand and document’ the understandings of others (Miller and Glassner 2011: 28). In this project interviews with curators and museum visitors were employed as a method of understanding how museum visitors perceive museum collections, and how museum curators intend for collections to be observed.

Interviews were held with key individuals directly involved in the curatorship and interpretation of the collections: museum curators and museum docents (see Table 1.1 below and for full transcriptions see Appendix A). These individuals were selected for interview because they each have a professional role as custodian of the collections under investigation. The institutional dynamics of museums across the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland typically includes a curator (or as in the case of the Ulster Museum, the National Museum of Ireland and the Chester Beatty Library multiple curators divided into subject departments), an educational officer and a number of non-specialist supervisory/gallery staff. The curators chosen for interview belong to the subject departments responsible for the East Asian collections in Ireland. In two cases the curators interviewed were subject specialists in the area of East Asian artefacts (Jessica Baldwin in the Chester Beatty Library and Audrey Whitty in the National Museum of Ireland). The other curators chosen for interview, although not subject specialists in the area of East Asia, are those currently in charge of the interpretation and display of the East Asian collections explored. In the case of the Hunt Museum, the curator interviewed (Naomi O’Nolan) is curator of the entire museum, including both Medieval and East Asian collections. In regard to the Ulster Museum, the interpretation and display of the *O’Neill Collection of East Asian Ceramics* falls to the curator responsible for the museum’s ceramic department (Kim Mawhinney). The typical dynamics of museum staffing alongside funding availability in institutions has therefore meant that hiring an East Asian specialist is not always possible. However, in the cases where such a specialist resides over the museum’s East Asian collection a greater knowledge of the art and artefacts alongside a greater awareness of the issues and discussions surrounding such collections is made possible. For instance, the display and interpretation approach taken by the Chester Beatty Library focusses on the cultural context of the objects on a much larger scale than that of the other institutions explored, and this has been made possible through the subject specialist employed

by the museum (Mary Redfern). With limited staff and funding many of the other institutions in Ireland rely on outside researchers to provide detailed information regarding their East Asian collections. This PhD research will add value and greater understanding to the East Asian collections explored, by generating additional research and contextual information surrounding them. Exploring the Hunt Museum and the Ulster Museum East Asian collections for the first time, and also extending research previously carried out on the East Asian collections residing in the National Museum of Ireland and the Chester Beatty Library.

These interviews were of a semi-structured nature. This allowed the interviews to be focussed on the topic at hand, but with the flexibility and freedom for curators to mention additional aspects which they found to be focal to the interpretation and display of each of these collections. Open-ended questions were asked, encouraging the curators to provide detailed responses concerning the collections which they are responsible for. Thus, this encourages a more detailed discussion of the collections and their displays.

Each of the museum curators were first questioned on their role in the museum. Then, they were asked to share the intended messages or narratives told through the displays. Next display specific questions were asked surrounding the placement of the objects on display, the colour choices used in each display, each display's consideration of lighting, and what inspired or influenced each display. Finally, curators were asked what is expected that museum visitors will observe during or take home after their visit, if any community groups have been involved with the collection and what the primary audience of each collection is.

Table 1.1 Interviews Conducted with Museum Curators and Volunteers

Institution	**Interviewee**	**Interviewee's Role Within the Museum (Date of Interview)**
National Museum of Ireland (Dublin)	Audrey Whitty	Head of Collections and Learning (3.12.2018: Digital Recording)
Chester Beatty Library (Dublin)	Jessica Baldwin	Head of Collections and Conservation (15.01.2019: Digital Recording)
Chester Beatty Library (Dublin)	Mary Redfern	Curator of East Asia (15.01.2019: Digital Recording)
Hunt Museum (Limerick)	Naomi O'Nolan	Head of Exhibitions and Collections (20.02.2019: Digital Recording)
Hunt Museum (Limerick)	Irene Macken	Museum Docent (20.02.2019: Digital Recording)
Hunt Museum (Limerick)	Margaret Walsh	Museum Docent (20.02.2019: Digital Recording)
Ulster Museum (Belfast)	Kim Mawhinney	Head of Art: National Museums Northern Ireland (15.03.2019: Digital Recording)

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with museum visitors after their visit to the collections under investigation (for the questionnaire see Appendix B). As the interviewer, I stood beside the displays in question for one full day in each case, asking all visitors who walked past if they would mind answering a few questions about the museum's East Asian collection. Therefore, there wasn't a selection criteria relating to the visitors interviewed. Due to the nature of each display as not necessarily a key visitor attraction in the museums they reside in, the numbers of participants were limited in each case. Every single visitor walking past the collections on the day of interview was asked if they would like to take part. For the National Museum of Ireland approximately 112 adults walked by the collection but out of this number only 11 agreed to an interview, in the Chester Beatty Library approximately 466 adults walked by the collection with 17 agreeing to an interview and for the Ulster Museum approximately 338 adults walked by the collection with 12 agreeing to an interview. The Hunt Museum was the only exception, as unlike the

other cases visitor interviews were not conducted by myself and instead by museum docents. On the day I had arranged to carry out visitor interviews in the Hunt Museum, the Captain's Room (where the museum's East Asian ceramic collection is currently displayed) was already in use for an event the entire day.

Visitor interviews captured a diversity of participants responses in their own words, regarding the collections. The National Centre for Research Methods discussion paper (Alder and Alder 2012: 10) recommends between twelve and sixty interviews for each qualitative study, accordingly this study completed around twelve interviews for each of the four museum sites. Conducting a smaller number of interviews across the four sites proved more achievable, as many of the displays are not particularly busy in terms of visitor numbers, so to capture more than this would have been more time consuming than the time available in this project. Also as these interviews were conducted across four sites this meant that overall fifty-two interviews were completed. Thirteen interviews were held at the Hunt Museum, seventeen at the Chester Beatty Library, eleven at the Ulster Museum and eleven at the National Museum of Ireland. These numbers were sufficient to capture an overall snapshot of how museum visitors responded to each of these collections, and how this compares to the intentions presumed by the museum curators.

Museum visitors were first asked if they enjoyed their experience visiting the collection and their favourite object in the display. These questions enabled visitors to begin opening up about their thoughts on the collection, and provided an introduction to the more in-depth questions which followed. Asking visitors about their favourite object, revealed insights into the personal motivations which influenced how they perceived and understood the collection. More often than not the object selected was the result of a personal interest, or an aspect of the visitors own identity (e.g. on one occasion a blue and white porcelain object was selected because it reminded the visitor of the Delft pottery produced where they themselves grew up: the Netherlands). Visitors were then asked questions which directly relate to the study. Including: what stories or aspects of history they felt the display was communicating, and who they felt was represented by the display. Finally, museum visitors were asked who they felt the display was most suitable for and who they

thought would enjoy visiting it the most. This final question provided insight into how inclusive current interpretative narratives are.

The interview data collected from both museum curators and visitors were analysed and assessed through an inductive approach, this involved coding the data collected into a series of common trends. In doing so the appearance of common themes shaped the research which followed the interview process, as it drew my attention to significant topics and areas that were reoccurring for each case study collection. An inductive approach is often assigned to qualitative methods. In this project, I looked for common trends emerging from the data, constructing patterns by noting the similarities and differences in the interpretation and narration strategies undertaken by each museum, alongside an analysis of visitor opinions, views and understandings of these strategies. For the interviews with museum curators, the challenges and functions of the collections were largely deciphered this way. Highlighting two challenges faced by the institutions: the interpretation of religious objects and the conservation challenges faced by museums. Two common functions of the collections were also highlighted: community engagement and education. Finally, in regard to curator interviews this process drew attention to common classification trends: art object or cultural artefact. In the interviews with museum visitors the significance of individual perception was the most commonly occurring trend, as I was repeatedly recording accounts of personal experience affecting the objects viewed and the meanings understood.

In qualitative research, the originators of grounded theory have provided much guidance following an inductive approach to data analysis, and it has been noted that ‘the resulting guidance can be relevant to all case studies’ (Yin 2014: 138). The procedures assign various kinds of codes to the data, ‘each code representing a concept or abstraction of potential interest’ (Yin 2014: 138). In grounded theory coding occurs informally with intuitive identification of key ideas and patterns, next grouping these initial codes into categories (Marshall and Rossman 2016: 222). In qualitative research, a code is therefore a researcher generated construct that translates data and attributes meaning (Saldana 2015: 4). In this body of research, generating codes has underlined the key interpretative concepts in each display, the

challenges faced by museums, the key functions of collections, and the significance of visitor perception.

Museum-Based Direct Observation

Direct observation of the collections was central to this investigation. Observing each exhibition allowed a direct examination of the narratives and interpretations communicated through the collections, and of the voice in which they are told. By directly observing the narration, interpretation and display of each case study, what each collection is seen to represent became clear. The text panels and labels in each exhibition acted as key evidence in reporting and examining the stories told. The physical artefacts in the exhibitions were likewise also a significant source of evidence, as they allowed insight into cultural features, identity representations, historic significance and technical processes. Photographs from these visits additionally helped to convey important case characteristics to outside observers (Yin 2003: 86). However, throughout this project I did take into account that direct observation is time-consuming, and that it can cause reflexivity (Yin 2003: 86). Therefore, my prolonged observation of each exhibition space and of the visitor interaction which occurred, may have caused visitors to interact differently with the collections.

The Importance of the Object

The tangible objects belonging to each of the museum collections investigated played a crucial role. By directly observing the objects in the collections, the variety of narratives which they can be seen to embody can be deciphered. Equally, the cultures and societies from which the objects originated can also be made sense of. Objects are imbedded in the culture that produced them, and thus embody some of that culture's beliefs (Prown 1995: 16). Furthermore, in this particular case, each of the objects under examination has been collected by an individual (Chester Beatty, Albert Bender, John Hunt or Con O'Neill). An investigation of the objects thus also revealed traits of each of these individual's personal tastes, values and backgrounds (see Chapter Seven). Museum objects are artefacts belonging to the past, but unlike historical events they continue to exist in our own time. But, similar to historical events, artefacts do not just happen and are instead 'the result of causes' (Prown

1995: 1). Therefore, although objects can never offer a complete picture of past societies, they are a powerful form of evidence (Hannan and Longair 2017: 2).

The biography of an object offers the same features as the biography of a person. This method obtains and records the various phases of an object's life, thus capturing the variety of diverse meanings and values which have become associated with the object. The object biography strand in material culture studies initially originated in the work of Kopytoff (1986), whose approach was essentially that of a biographer with a focus on individual objects. At the core of Kopytoff's (1986: 93) object biography model is the argument that 'one can draw an analogy between the way societies construct individuals and the way they construct things'. Withi this framework, objects therefore do not simply mirror pre-existing social values and ideas. They are instead the very medium through which these values, ideas and social distinctions are constantly reproduced and legitimised (Tilley 2006: 60). Accordingly, biographical approaches study the multiple phases of an objects life 'by analysing commonalities and differences in the forms and associations of specific object classes and the paths and decisions that characterise their circulation' (Stahl 2010: 155).

Appadurai (1986) is another prominent theorist in advancing the study of object lives, however he instead uses the term life histories. The primary exploration of this was by investigating the many transformations commodities pass through, and the mobility of things in re-contextualisation throughout their lives. Indicating that objects mediate social agency. Appadurai shows that objects are altered and may be put to various uses through the course of their life history, with varied effects on those who use them (Stahl 2010: 155). Therefore, maintaining that 'human actors encode things with significance', illuminating their social context (Appadurai 1986: 4). Consequently, it is human transactions such as those between object and collector, which animate or enliven objects and bestow them with a life history similar to humans. This view is of particular significance in this thesis as each of the collections and individual objects investigated have passed through the hands of collectors.

When investigating objects, this research applies the approaches advanced by both Kopytoff (1986) and Appadurai (1986). Accordingly, this thesis has implemented

both the terms life history and biography when exploring the objects. Used alone the object biography model of study presents difficulties. It usually highlights only exceptional or unusual features of the object, and in this thesis, the generic qualities of the objects are equally of interest in deciphering the many narratives and representations which they embody. This approach equally comes with the risk of describing objects rather than providing an understanding of their past (Burstrom 2014: 65). The biographical method of enquiry can also make objects too 'active', as in fact objects remain inanimate until activated by people (Tythacott 2011a: 7). Further difficulties arise as objects often change their meanings throughout their lives according to the ways in which they are used, or disappear for long periods of time. These difficulties increase with the age of the object. As a result, sections of an object's biography often remain incomprehensible. Therefore, it is often the case that object biographies highlight the gaps in the investigation as much as they assist in gathering and recording the known information (Dannehl 2009: 125). However, rather than aiming to include every stage of exchange, the life history model instead underlines the social transformations of objects; including both mundane and exceptional qualities.

A means to overcome these challenges is thus to incorporate the life history model (alongside the object biography model), which underlines every stage of an object's life in much greater detail. Coupled, both models assist the researcher in 'dealing with the complexities and above all with the absences in a constructive manner' (Harvey 2009: 133), allowing this PhD thesis to present a wider range of information surrounding the objects in question. Utilising both models in this case is applicable, as not only do there exist large gaps in previously recorded information surrounding the objects, but many of these specific objects (in the context of the collections they reside in) have never before been researched. For this reason, it will become apparent that in each case general information surrounding the objects, or the type of object in question, has been applied. Subsequently, this thesis does not document all the interpretation placed on these objects throughout their lives, and only reconstructs relevant narratives (relevant to the theme of each chapter). In this thesis, the focus in approaching object biographies/life histories is therefore to give emphasis to the multiple meanings of an object, and to contrast this alongside the select display narratives which have been implemented.

Self-Reflexivity

As a final point in this discussion of research methods, it is vital to note that both qualitative and constructionist approaches to research require an extent of self-reflexivity. Researchers using a social constructionist framework, recognise that their own background shapes their interpretation (Creswell 2007: 18). Accordingly, all qualitative researchers bring values to a study, thus this research is fully embedded in my own perspectives as the researcher and in the specific historical and cultural moment when this research is being carried out. As qualitative research is always executed in context, the contextual factors and environmental variables which may equally influence the results must be considered (Fellows and Liu 2015: 6). In particular, it also needs to be acknowledged that object biographies/life histories are constructions and are subject to the social and cultural context of the researcher. As the researcher, I bring to every biography 'some prior conception of what is to be its focus' (Kopytoff 1986: 66). Equally, the current meanings and values placed upon the objects under enquiry, do not necessarily correspond with how these objects were initially perceived by the East Asian societies who manufactured them. Western cultural values have therefore impacted them in their current Western museum context.

In regard to the interview process in particular, I considered my own contribution to the construction of meaning. This includes the formation of research questions, the interviews scheduled and the method of analysis undertaken. Constructionist standpoints perceive interviewing as a 'social encounter in which knowledge is actively produced' (Holstein and Gubrium 2011: 32). Therefore, interviewing is not a neutral pursuit but rather a site of interpretative practice. Interviews fundamentally shape and form the content of what is said, and 'actively' produce their results (Holstein and Gubrium 2011: 33). Meaning thus comes into existence through our engagement with the social world (King and Horrocks 2010: 22). Meaning is not 'out there waiting to be discovered', but instead it is brought into being in the process of social exchange (King and Horrocks 2010: 22). Meaning-making is continually an unfolding process (Holstein and Gubrium 1995: 52). Therefore, human beings, both myself as the researcher and the interview participants, cannot remove themselves from the process of active engagement in knowledge production through interviews.

Originality of the Thesis

This research aims to add further value and greater understanding to the East Asian collections in Ireland, generating additional contextual information surrounding them and situating the discussion around the scholarship on East Asian collections elsewhere. This thesis explores museum collections which have previously never been the focus of research: the East Asian collections of the Hunt Museum and the Ulster Museum's O'Neill collection. The thesis also extends research previously carried out on the East Asian collections of the Chester Beatty Library and the National Museum of Ireland. While previous work has considered the biographical account of the collectors' lives, this study places a specific focus on the narration, interpretation and display of these collections for the first time. Furthermore, this research extends the theory of narrative in the area of museum studies; outlining narrative for museum practice. The use of the term narrative in museum practice is currently unclear, and is not conclusively covered in museum studies literature. Thus, by elaborating on existing research this project dispels the uncertainty surrounding current definitions of the term. The thesis then adds to new knowledge by broadening the information known about the narration of East Asian collections in Ireland.

The collection and display of East Asian objects in the West is an area which has been rapidly developed in the last twenty years for collections residing in England, France, Amsterdam and America (Cohen 1992; Clunas 1998; Pagani 1998; Barnes 2011; Tythacott 2011a; Metrick-Chen 2012; Chang 2013; Corrigan et al. 2015; Meyer and Brysac 2015; Barnes 2016; Pierson 2017b). However, this global scholarship has not as of yet, adequately addressed East Asian collections on the island of Ireland. By focussing on Ireland this research contributes to a gap in the scholarship.

The thesis also outlines the differing approaches applied when interpreting works of art as opposed to cultural artefacts. It will become evident in my study of the collections in Ireland, that divergent approaches are used depending on the object's classification as either an art object or a cultural artefact. This is an area which

previously has been largely under-examined and overlooked in the surrounding museum studies literature internationally. Thus, by exploring this area the thesis contributes to the field of museum display.

Equally this project employs a new approach to researching East Asian museum collections. In this thesis, I utilise interdisciplinary methodologies between three distinct disciplines: museum studies, cultural sociology and art history. This multidisciplinary approach enabled both an investigation of the display strategies evident in each museum alongside an investigation of the tangible objects. Previous research has tended to focus on either the technicalities of museum display (museum studies approach) or on the art object (art history approach), with both rarely featuring in the one research project.

In recent years a mixed-method approach to the examination of East Asian collections has been advanced by Amy Jane Barnes (2016). Barnes' work drew on exhibition analysis, interviews, textual sources and archival records in her examination of museum representations of Maoist China. However, this study focusses largely on historical analysis rather than on the objects themselves. Louise Tythacott (2011a) has completed the biography of a set of rare Buddhist statues from China, currently displayed in the Museum of Liverpool, as a method of exploring representations of China. This focus on the contrary examines museum representations through the objects specifically. Stacey Pierson's seminal research into the Burlington Fine Arts Club (2017a), and likewise her research into the redisplay of the British Museum's East Asian collection (2017b) has underlined the role of private collecting in the shaping of art history in London. Here emphasis is placed on the impact of private collectors on museum collections, and distinctions between the displays of such collections in the private and public sectors. Pierson has also completed a range of important volumes that focus on East Asian ceramics and their consumption in Britain (2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2013).

Taking into account existing research on East Asian museum collections conducted by Barnes, Tythacott and Pierson, this study draws on this existing work in a holistic way which helps in a broader understanding of the context of the collections in Ireland. Examining in equal parts current display approaches, object biographies,

and the impact of collectors this thesis furthers the mixed-method approach instigated by Barnes, employing it alongside interdisciplinary methodologies. It takes into account the display methods utilised when presenting East Asian collections to the public in Ireland, the context (biographies) of the objects themselves and the context of their collectors. Thus, uncovering the true breadth of the multiplicity of stories existent in the objects, and instigating an enhanced understanding of their display.

Exploring the objects in their current display context enabled an understanding of how these objects are currently being perceived, comprehended, used and remembered in museum environments. This thesis has also taken into account the impact that private collectors had on the formation of each collection and its donation to an Irish museum. Furthering this, it has also examined the multiplicity of narratives these objects have become associated with throughout their lives, bringing to light the additional contexts which are being overlooked in current displays. Nevertheless, as this investigation aimed to consider both sides of the coin (museum objects alongside their current display strategies), this limited any possibility for detailed object biographies to be completed (comparable to Tythacott's 2011a study). Instead focus was placed upon select examples from each collection and the thematic diversity of contexts/narratives which are embodied in these. This helped to concentrate the object enquiry conducted towards achieving the aim of this investigation: examining the social, cultural and political ideologies represented.

Ethical Considerations

In accordance with the Social Research Associations ethics guidelines (Social Research Association 2003), this research project employed a principlist approach to ethics. The prevailing concern was to cause no harm to any individual or institution involved in the project. Primary concerns included informed consent and confidentiality. Participants were made aware of what the research is about, what will happen to the results, what their participation in the project will involve and the potential risks and benefits of their involvement. Informed consent also allowed participants the ability to withdraw from the study at any time.

Definition of Key Terms

In order to frame the main discussion, it is first necessary to define the key terms used in this thesis. Three terms will be defined, as they each play a prominent role in the chapters which follow: identity which is explored further in Chapter Two, community which is a theme in Chapter Six and authenticity which plays a significant role in Chapter Seven (Object Case Study Three). Although, it is important to note that the three terms are not restricted to these chapters and are significant themes throughout the thesis.

Identity

Identity is a construction, and as such the term holds a variety of meanings and uses in society. Three widely acknowledged definitions of identity include Kreps' (2003: 10) definition of identity as the 'totality of images that a group has of itself, its past, present and future', Castells' (1997: 6) understanding of identity as 'people's source of meaning and experience' and Taylor's (1997: 20) definition which regards identity to be 'the way we see ourselves in relation to other people'. Therefore, identity can be understood as the image individuals and groups construct of themselves. However, it can also be understood as an image constructed by distinguishing oneself from those who are different. This factor of identity construction is especially relevant to the display of East Asian collections in a Western museum environment, as in such cases the collections are presented in a cultural setting which differs from that of their origin.

Current debate surrounding identity proposes two broad understandings of the term: an essentialist view and a contemporary view (McLean and Newman 2002: 57). The essentialist view suggests that identity does not change over time and is therefore a fixed construction, alternatively the contemporary view of identity sees it as changing over time, thus not permanent but instead frequently changing and reconstructing in relation to particular contexts. In this thesis the term identity will be used to explore how museum visitors connect with and understand displayed objects, and also in exploring how East Asian collections represent the societies and cultures from which they originated. In doing so it will enforce the contemporary view of identity,

underlining the variety of meanings and uses museum objects can be seen to embody.

Community

Community is a complex sociological term which can be seen to possess many meanings. Defining the term community is therefore a particularly challenging task. In an article published in 1955, Hilary found there to be no fewer than ninety-four definitions of community with only one common element between them; that all definitions deal with people (Hilary 1995, cited by Diaz 2000: 1). In a physical sense communities are therefore made up of people and it is these people who bring meaning to them. Today we can certainly state that there must be many more definitions of the term community, also it is clear that meanings of this term change with the context in which they are placed. Accordingly, while at points it may seem that a stable definition of community has been reached, the fact that society is constantly changing needs to be taken into account, as when these changes occur the definition loses validity; the meaning of community consequently changes over time.

Community is commonly defined as ‘a social group with a common territorial base; those in the group share interests and have a sense of belonging to the group’ (Stebbins 1987: 534). Therefore, community is tightly linked to group identity, feelings of belonging and a shared geographic location. However, complexities occur as even though someone may consider themselves to be part of one community they are not excluded from being part of another. The variances in definitions of the term community therefore indicate that instead of settling on one term we must address the diversity, complexity and various characteristics of communities in order to fully understand them. Nevertheless, in the museum environment broad definitions of community are frequently used, such as ‘Chinese community’ or ‘local community’. The use of these terms should not be homogenised, and although this thesis refers to communities as they have been grouped by the museums explored, the complexities in these community groups have not been overlooked.

In this thesis community will primarily be discussed in regard to museum community engagement initiatives. Community engagement is an aspect of museum audience

development programmes that the institutions discussed have in place in order to begin to revise and improve challenges surrounding representation and inclusion. Therefore, in this thesis the term community will be utilised in regard to museums endeavouring to engage with a community group that they wish to better represent or engage through collections.

Authenticity

Authenticity can be defined as a 'judgement or value placed on what is assessed' (Brida, Disengna and Scuderi 2012: 519). In the museum environment authenticity is commonly understood as the value attributed to genuine objects (authentic), as opposed to the lesser value attributed to fake or reproduction objects (non-authentic). Objects of natural history can be considered authentic by virtue of their origin in nature, contrasting to the questionable authenticity of many objects arising from an 'intentional manufacturing process' (Bunce 2016: 230). Man-made objects are generally seen to be authentic if they are an original (not a replica or fake), or if they embody a historic link to a person, place or event (Bunce 2016: 230). In this case each of the objects explored embody a historic link to their collectors.

Authenticity has become an important attribute of the museum visitor experience. Generally, objects displayed in museums and the information provided by these objects (including museum interpretations and narratives) are thought by visitors to be genuine. Failure for museum visitors to appreciate authenticity in a display may 'undermine not only the aesthetic value of museum visits but also interfere with potential educational gains' (Bunce 2016: 230). However, as the four museum collections explored in this thesis were each accumulated by an individual, then restored or preserved and displayed in a museum space, they can each be argued to embody value and significance, and as such can be identified as authentic personal collections.

Outline of the Chapters to Follow

Chapter Two provides a systematic literature review surrounding four prominent topics of interest. These areas are: East Asian collections in Ireland, relations between East Asia and the West, museums and identity, and museum narrative. By

exploring these four strands of literature the key issues and theories relating to this study were uncovered, and the research conducted is further justified. The context and theoretical groundwork for this project is likewise established by examining these fundamental strands of literature.

Following this, Chapter Three is the first of four chapters focussing specifically on the area of museum display and its functions: together forming Section One of this project (Chapters Three to Six). Chapter Three begins by exploring the display approaches taken for each of the case studies examined in this research project. It provides background information on the design and interpretation approaches used in each case, in particular it explores attributes of museum display: colour, lighting, text, interpretation and narration. These elements demonstrated their significance during the interview process conducted with the curators responsible for each collection, as they were each repeatedly mentioned by the museum professionals involved. It becomes apparent that each of these elements completely change an exhibition, alter the portrayal of objects and collections and transform how visitors interact with what is on display. Visitor interactions and responses to each display are also taken into account, in order to appropriately examine the display strategies and interpretations used in each case.

Leading on from this discussion, Chapter Four takes a more in-depth look at the challenges surrounding museum display practices, discussing two primary areas: conservation and the display of religious objects. These are two recurring challenges which emerged from the interviews conducted with museum curators. Through Chapter Four, it becomes evident that museum professionals encounter many challenges in regard to the display of East Asian collections in Ireland. This includes the interpretation and presentation of religious objects and the preservation of fragile objects on display. In each case, although these challenges are applied to the specific context of East Asian museum collections in Ireland, they are challenges which affect contemporary museum practice more broadly, and thus are extremely topical issues today.

Chapter Five explores the theoretical challenges surrounding the interpretation, narration and display of the four East Asian collections (the four case studies). Similar to Chapter Four, the challenges highlighted here emerged from the interview process. Firstly, discussing the topical debate surrounding the display of East Asian material as either art or artefact. This issue is a prominent one, as generally East Asian objects can either be perceived as artefacts through which knowledge of cultures and histories can be transmitted, or as art which holds aesthetic appeal. To date this debate has been inadequately represented in the surrounding literature, thus this study corrects the existent gap. The second theoretical challenge unfolded is that of perception. Perception and reception are concealed factors which affect the presentation and exhibition of any museum collection, therefore topics widely applicable to contemporary museum practice. In regard to the East Asian collections displayed in Ireland, it holds imperative implications in the areas of understanding, learning and representation.

The last chapter in Section One is Chapter Six. This chapter unfolds the uses of museum collections, by exploring two functions which the museum displays explored in this thesis have been used for. These two functions are: the educational practices implemented through the Ulster Museum and Hunt Museum displays, and the community engagement initiatives facilitated by the National Museum of Ireland and the Chester Beatty Library displays. These two functions of the collections likewise dominated the interviews conducted with the curators currently responsible for each of these displays. It becomes evident that the functions of these displays in their current museum environment echo the aims and objectives of each institution.

It is important to note that when examining museum display (Section One), the roles of individual objects in the displays have not been overlooked. This enables the exploration of display strategies from both a micro and macro perspective. This approach becomes most evident when discussing the display and interpretation challenges surrounding religious objects in museum spaces. In this particular investigation thangka paintings and Bodhisattva statues which feature in the displays have been considered in depth. Also, when exploring the educational function of the Ulster Museum display, select objects have likewise been taken into consideration.

Section Two of this thesis then occurs in Chapter Seven. The attention of this section is objects and their collection, focussing on the multiple meanings and identities associated with museum objects. Individual narratives of the objects in the displays, alongside the wider narrative surrounding their accumulation into a museum collection are explored. Although this section is shorter in length to Section One, the discussion to follow is in no way less significant. It promotes the wealth of social, cultural and political ideologies embodied by each object discussed. This section uncovers the full breadth of the multiplicity of narratives existent in the East Asian collections held in Ireland.

Section Two is in three parts, which further highlight the significance of objects in each of the collections, through an exploration of three distinct themes: collected objects, multiple values and cross-cultural contact. Objects from the four collections investigated in this study were selected for further exploration in Section Two because of the prominent narratives they embody but which are not represented in current museum interpretation strategies, thus advancing a further understanding of the currently untold stories and histories surrounding these objects. The three areas explored are therefore important, as together they enable a deeper understanding of the collections. First, netsuke and snuff bottles displayed in the Chester Beatty Library and the National Museum of Ireland are discussed (Object Case Study One). Exploring what it means for these objects to have been assembled by private collectors, and how the collected backgrounds of these objects undoubtedly impact how they are currently interpreted, narrated and perceived. The grouping of these objects together into collections by individuals has imposed the tastes, values and backgrounds of each individual onto the overall meaning of these collections today. Next, through the exploration of a pilgrim flask in the Ulster Museum collection, the multiple values embodied in this object are highlighted (Object Case Study Two). This exposes that the value of an object is an ephemeral quality, largely determined by its place in time and society. Finally, through an investigation of the Hunt Museum's Chinoiserie, the cross-cultural contact facilitated through the presentation of East Asian collections in a Western museum setting is further divulged (Object Case Study Three). Discovering that the display strategies implemented by museums alongside the entangled histories of many of the objects themselves, poses challenges in terms of identity representation.

The conclusion of this PhD thesis is presented in Chapter Eight. This final chapter explores the future of collection, narration and display practices in Irish museums, focussing on the East Asian collections explored in this study. Such collections encounter particularly complex challenges, as their place in Western institutions enables them to act as contact zones between East Asian and Western cultures and societies, increasing the implication of their function and value in a museum setting. Likewise, their current geographic positioning facilitates the ability for relations and connections to be nurtured with migrant communities living in Ireland, causing additional strain on the consequence of interpreting and displaying these collections. The current purpose and function of each display, the narratives which they portray, and the challenges faced by museums are summarised. This deciphers what is in store for the future of each of the displays, and advancing how the full potential of these collections could be reached. In doing so museum studies theory and practice is informed and this helps establish how Irish museums understand the East Asian collections they retain, and verifying how these collections are experienced by visitors. This chapter also provides conclusions on how we understand narrative in the museum space, and how interpretation strategies influence the representations made through museum displays.

Chapter Two
Four Key Areas of Inquiry

This chapter draws upon four key areas of enquiry, which each need to be considered in order to grasp an understanding of the overall research area: East Asian collections in Ireland, relations between East Asia and the West, museums and identity, and museum narrative. This chapter explores each of these in turn, and makes the point that although each area is discussed separately the connections between them are essential to their understanding in this study. Moreover, this chapter primarily provides an introduction to each of these topics and to the current debates surrounding them, more in-depth discussion surrounding each area features throughout this thesis.

Topic One: East Asian Collections in Ireland

This PhD research brings new academic attention to four prominent East Asian collections in Ireland. This section provides an overview of each of these collections, and of their current museum contexts. Also, it highlights significant topics from the current literature surrounding the collections, as they relate to this study. It becomes apparent that the East Asian collections in the Hunt Museum and the Ulster Museum have never before been the focus of research. Existing research surrounding the East Asian collections in the Chester Beatty Library and the National Museum of Ireland has focused on a biographical account of the two collectors' lives, including their connections to Ireland and to prominent Irish individuals. Exploring this literature therefore reinforces that this thesis presents information in writing for the first time, and also elaborates on existing work. This is achieved by allowing the objects in these collections and their narration to become the focus of study.

The Albert Bender Collection: National Museum of Ireland

Albert Bender's personal background is the primary focus of the existing literature on this collection. The only sustained research has been undertaken by National Museum of Ireland curator Audrey Whitty (2011), who has carried out historical documentary analysis on the donation of this collection to the NMI, in the context of

Bender's cultural interests in Ireland and California. This research focusses largely on Bender's personal life, including his Jewish background, his childhood in Ireland, his friendship with Adolf Mahr the NMI Keeper of Irish Antiquities/Director (1927-1939), and his connections to prominent Irish individuals (primarily artists and writers). Furthermore, the connections between Albert Bender and Adolf Mahr are discussed by Mullins (2011) in his biography of Mahr. There exists much crossover between the lives of Bender and Mahr, through accounts of Bender's letter writing to Mahr, and the donations Bender made through him to the National Museum of Ireland. The correspondence which occurred between Albert Bender and Adolf Mahr is thus a topic which prominently features in research to date, with Whitty noting it to be the 'most surprising friendship to have emerged as a result of Albert Bender's donations' (Whitty 2010b: 80). Bender's Jewish upbringing is significant here, as the majority of his donations to the National Museum of Ireland occurred under the supervision of the German-born Mahr who was a well-known Nazi sympathiser.

Comparisons can also be made between Albert Bender and Alfred Chester Beatty, whose Dublin collection will next be explored in this chapter. Both men began as book collectors, but as their collecting tastes evolved they took an interest in East Asian objects. In both cases these objects were sourced from prominent art dealers of the time, thus both men would have been subject to the availability of similar objects for purchase. Additionally, both men generated their fortunes in America but their collections have resided in the Republic of Ireland. As a consequence, Bender and Beatty can be related to recent studies on the psychological background to collecting in early twentieth-century America. It has been noted by Horton (2003: 10) that the collecting pursuits of many American collectors of this period, produced a means which 'allowed them to cope with a modernising world'. Hence like many collectors, Beatty and Bender were influenced by the collecting fashions of their era.

Table 2.1 Background and Context of the Albert Bender Collection

Museum	National Museum of Ireland (Dublin).
Collector	Albert Maurice Bender (1886-1941), insurance agent, born in Dublin but spent the majority of his life in San Francisco.
Size of collection	260 artefacts (170 currently on display).
Date of donation/ public display	Between 1931 and 1936. This collection was only displayed for a short time in 1936, remaining in storage until more space was available to the museum. The current instillation of this collection opened to the public in 2008 (see Figure 2.1 below).
Context of donation	Bender began writing to the then Keeper of Irish Antiquities Adolf Mahr (1887-1951) in 1931 regarding his forthcoming acquisitions. Bender's East Asian art collection was purchased with the sole intention of museum donation and public display, rather than to enter Bender's personal collection. Two main dealers were involved in sourcing this material from China and Japan. Henry Heart, who frequently wrote to the museum with explanations regarding many of the donations and T. Z. Shiota, who was responsible for the collection of much of the Japanese material (National Museum of Ireland 2017a).
Purpose of donation	In honour of his mother Augusta Bender.
Objects within the collection	Japanese ukiyo-e and netsuke, Chinese snuff bottles, ceramics, porcelain, jade, metalwork, Buddhist sculptures, a priest robe and a set of Tibetan Buddhist thangka paintings.

Figure 2.1 The Albert Bender collection, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin (2019). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

The Chester Beatty Collection: Chester Beatty Library

Much of the current literature surrounding Chester Beatty and his collection focusses on his holdings of texts, books and manuscripts with less attention given to his collections of East Asian material, with the exception of work by Sormachi (1979), who specifically explores the Japanese illustrated books and manuscripts from the collection. Many scholars have instead taken a biographical account of Beatty's life and the background of the Chester Beatty Library as their emphasis. This includes the dated publications by Hayes (1967), Henchy (1986) and Kennedy (1988). More recent research has been advanced by Croke (2017), current Director of the Chester Beatty Library, who has published a *Director's Choice* of objects from the museum, detailing a few of the collection's East Asian artefacts. Within this Croke (2017: 8) also discusses the history of the Chester Beatty Library and of Alfred Chester Beatty's life, highlighting Beatty's connection to Ireland which begins when he moves

to Dublin in 1950. Many reasons for this move are stated; including his liking of Ireland, his retirement and for the security of his collection.

Table 2.2 Background and Context of the Chester Beatty Collection

Museum	The Chester Beatty Library (Dublin).
Collector	Sir Alfred Chester Beatty (1875-1968), career in mining, born in New York but spent time living in Ireland.
Size of collection	Largest of the case studies. Actual size of the East Asian collection unknown; current displays only offer one percent of the collection. The collection in its entirety (East Asian, European, Middle Eastern and African artefacts) includes approximately twenty-five thousand objects.
Date of public display	This collection became its own museum. First presented to the public in the early 1950s (Irish Examiner 1954). After then moving twice, the collection finally resided in its current location in 2000 (see Figure 2.2 below).
Context of collection	The majority of East Asian objects were collected during a 'world health cruise' which Beatty embarked on in 1917 (Kennedy 1988: 26). Beatty spent six months touring China and Japan, when he returned he retained an agent to continue the acquisition of this material for him (Croke 2017: 64).
Purpose of collection	Beatty revealed that when he came across East Asian objects of value or significance on his travels, he felt a 'duty to purchase them and keep them together' (Henchy 1986: 1). The collection later became its own museum as Beatty was concerned that leaving his collection to a large institution in London (presumably the British Museum), would have caused it to later be 'dispersed' (Croke 2017: 9).
Objects within the collection	Mostly Qing dynasty (1644-1911): Chinese silk painting, Japanese woodblock prints, Chinese snuff bottles, Japanese netsuke, inro and tsuba, Buddhist paintings and sculptures, Chinese and Japanese painted scrolls and Chinese imperial robes.

Figure 2.2 The Sir Alfred Chester Beatty collection, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (2019). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

The Con O'Neill Collection: Ulster Museum

Not much has been previously written about this collection, or Sir Con O'Neill's personal background, accepting what can be found in his obituary and in dictionaries of biography. Basic information regarding the collection is provided in unpublished work by its current curator Kim Mawhinney (Mawhinney 2002). This information is used to give context to the collection in its current display, through the outlets of a text panel and labels in the exhibit. Including information surrounding the names and origins of objects, Sir Con O'Neill's donation, the broad history of Chinese ceramics and a brief history of the China Trade. Similar to this collection, the Hunt Museum's East Asian collection which will next be explored, is also solely comprised of ceramic examples.

Table 2.3 Background and Context of the Con O'Neill Collection

Museum	Ulster Museum (Belfast).
Collector	Sir Con Douglas Walter O'Neill (1911-1988), diplomat, born in Northern Ireland but lived in China then Finland.
Size of collection	31 objects, 28 currently on display (see Figure 2.3 below).
Date of donation/ public display	1960. Current display since 2009, when the Ulster Museum reopened to the public and the collection was placed on display for the first time. This was supported by the prior purchase of this collection by the Ulster Museum in 2002, enabling it to be a permanent feature within the museum. The purchase of this collection was supported by three charity commissions: the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Art Fund and Esme Mitchell Trust.
Context of donation	Because of his family connections in Northern Ireland, O'Neill gave the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery (later the Ulster Museum) the choice of his collection (on loan) before he travelled to Finland to be the British Ambassador.
Purpose of donation	By selecting a range of diverse objects, it was hoped that this collection would act as a teaching resource, which allowed the museum to almost fully document the early history of Chinese ceramics.
Objects within the collection	Earthenware, stoneware and porcelain from the T'ang dynasty (618-907) through to the Qing dynasty (1644-1911).

Figure 2.3 The Sir Con O'Neill collection, Ulster Museum, Belfast (2019). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

The John Hunt Collection: Hunt Museum

O'Connell's (2013) biographical account of John Hunt, is the only published work on Hunt and his collection. O'Connell provides an account of Hunt's family life, work life and personal background. Including, his beginnings as an art dealer/collector and the formation of the Hunt Museum. This research primarily mentions the medieval material Hunt sold and collected, with only one mention of the East Asian material he

also collected. In 1941, John Hunt and his wife Gertrude Hunt moved to a house in Lough Gur, Limerick (O'Connell 2013: 91). At this stage in his life Hunt had developed a passion for archaeology, and this house became a base from which he could engage in his interest. Hunt's most prominent excavation was in Ballingarry Down (Limerick), on what was initially assumed a Norman house site. Instead the site revealed the presence of a series of superimposed buildings, pointing to habitation from the early Christian times. Here Hunt discovered pieces of Chinese pottery at this site, indicating that 'Chinese traders had visited the Shannon Estuary around the time of St Patrick, some 1,500 years earlier' (O'Connell 2013: 109). It was this chance discovery that triggered Hunt's interest in Chinese ceramics.

Like Albert Bender, as his collection developed, Hunt also corresponded with National Museum of Ireland Director Adolf Mahr. The first recorded communication between Hunt and Mahr was in January 1936 when Hunt made an offer to the National Museum of Ireland 'of a collection of ten Irish gold ornaments from the Pitt-Rivers Museum in Farnham' (O'Connell 2013: 74). This work connection is completely separate to the friendship which occurred also around this time, between Mahr and Bender. Bender and Mahr's correspondence also possesses obvious distinctions, as it began through Bender's donation not sale of objects to the National Museum of Ireland.

Table 2.4 Background and Context of the John Hunt Collection

Museum	The Hunt Museum (Limerick).
Collector	John Durell Hunt (1900–1976) and his wife Gertrude. Both were art dealers and advisors to collectors. Hunt was born in England but spent time living in Ireland.
Size of collection	Within this collection only a small proportion of objects are of an East Asian origin, as John Hunt was predominantly a medievalist.
Date of public display	Following John Hunt's death, the collection was housed in the University of Limerick on a temporary basis (1976). The Hunt Museum then opened in its current location in 1997 (see Figure 2.4 below).
Context of collection	The Hunt family collected pieces which reflected 'their own interests and curiosity rather than for commercial purposes' (The Hunt Museum 2018). Hunt's journey as a collector began after the First World War (1914-18), when the antiques and art trade in England had expanded immensely. With the widespread demolition of country houses producing a mass of objects to be sold by dealers.
Purpose of collection	These objects were largely collected for personal use by the Hunt family. Many of the Chinese ceramic objects within the Hunt Museum's collection were used as decoration and ornamentation in the Hunt family home (predominantly the Hunt's final residence in Drumleck). East Asian ceramics were used by the Hunt family for their original purposes 'notwithstanding their value as antique pieces'; an example being Ming dynasty vases used to display flowers (O'Connell 2013: 198).
Objects within the collection	Chinese porcelain including Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) dynasty wares, Chinese earthenware, Japanese ceramics including Imari ware, German porcelain, English porcelain/delftware and Irish delftware.

Figure 2.4 The John Hunt collection, Hunt Museum, Limerick (2019). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

A New Approach to Researching East Asian Collections in Ireland

The biographical and historical documentary approaches to research surrounding the collectors, have been vital as a departure point in my own investigations of the development of the collections. However, my work differs in that it focusses specifically on the collections and the objects in them, rather than the lives of the collectors. It also differs in that I give close attention to the East Asian material,

which has not always been the focus of those I have referred to above. By doing so I bring the consideration of East Asian collections into the wider dynamics of Irish museum narrative and interpretation. This adds further value to the collections, as a result of establishing alternative strands of meaning regarding their context and current display.

Topic Two: Relations Between East Asia and the West

Exploring the background, academic discourse, and current debates surrounding the relationship between East Asia and the West provides context for each of the museum collections previously discussed. It reveals how East Asian cultures have historically been perceived by the West, and how these perceptions are perhaps changing in recent decades. These changing perspectives are especially significant in the context of museums, causing massive implications for current displays of East Asian artefacts. The history of Western engagement with East Asia is thus revealing not only in regard to past events, but also aids in better understanding present realities. The history and amalgamation of East Asian material culture into Western museums has been explored for a variety of museum collections, predominantly in Britain. The equivalent has not been undertaken for East Asian collections in Ireland. Examining this area is one of the most important original contributions of this PhD study.

In discussing this area, the focus will be on Western attitudes towards East Asia in the nineteenth century, reflecting a time frame when many East Asian objects first reached Western shores. The objects in the four case studies were largely traded and collected during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Chapter Seven discusses this in greater depth). Many of these collected objects also originated from Chinese porcelain production during the nineteenth century. Images of China constructed by Britain/the West more generally will also be the focus; a result of the limitations of current literature, as to date this area is inadequately researched in relation to Ireland.

The terms ‘East’, ‘East Asia’ and ‘West’ will be used to explore the ideological paradigms that they predominately represented during the nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries, corresponding with the focus of this study. Also, the discussion of China's history in this section has inevitably been simplified and condensed, in order to provide a brief overview of this period as it relates to the East Asian material culture now residing in Irish museum collections.

Consuming China: Nineteenth-Century Trade and Western Perception of East Asia

Western interest in East Asian material culture largely followed the Opium Wars (1839-42 and 1856-60), which coincides with colonial expansion. During this period, demand for Chinese export goods reached its peak in the West, with a particular demand for ceramics. Although Chinese material culture was highly regarded, the 1842 Treaty of Nanking (which ended the first Opium War) marks the point when Western perceptions of Chinese society began to shift away from the high regard observed in previous centuries. The Opium Wars negatively changed 'English perceptions of the Chinese population' (Pagani 1998: 28; Barnes 2011: 386). In the nineteenth century, the majority of Western attitudes were ethnocentric and consistent with the imperialism of their day (Mackerras 1989: 265). The overwhelming majority of Western perceptions of China at this time were thus influenced by power relationships, and reflected Western supremacy (Mackerras 1989: 265; Hevia 2003; Tythacott 2018).

The objects in the four East Asian collections in Ireland are largely outcomes of trade between East Asia and the West (further discussed in Chapter Seven). Beyond Western fascination with the 'Cultural Other' which will next be discussed, such objects were mass traded in the nineteenth century due to their moderate price in comparison to 'Western products of similar quality' (Clunas 1997: 19). The trade relationship between East Asia and the West largely 'exploited the East' and can even be regarded as 'systematic crime against humanity' (Clunas 1997: 12). Chinese perceptions of the trade are often ignored. Day (2010: 2) notes that 'the Chinese had mixed feelings about trade with the outside world', and in the trade industry, commonly referred to all 'non-Chinese as foreign devils not to be trusted'.

In accordance with Western perceptions of Chinese culture and society at this time, the export objects produced and traded portrayed an exotified East Asia, reinforcing common Western misconceptions of the 'Cultural Other'. The design history of

Chinese ceramics in the nineteenth century therefore reveals a shifting balance of economic power away from China as the producer and towards Western consumers. In order to ensure the saleability of Chinese goods in the West, traders and merchants dictated the shape, style and decoration of export goods. Whilst China's political and economic subordination to the West increased it was common for stereotypical images of 'dragons, bamboos and pagodas' to decorate export objects, these symbols emphasised the 'mysterious East' (Clunas 1997: 20). At this time merchants also encouraged Western craftsmen to imitate Chinese wares. Thus, nineteenth-century Chinese porcelain consumption became characterised by 'exotic Asian trade goods' produced in both East Asia and West (Vollmer, Keall and Nagal-Berthrong 1993: 220).

A result of Western impact on Chinese commodity production was a stereotyped image of 'China made by the Chinese, according to what British people felt was Chinese style' (Pagani 1998: 32). When export objects then reached the West, they became the primary means through which the vast majority of the population envisioned China (Barnes 2011: 386). Indeed, it has been argued that when Western consumers purchased objects from China, they were 'participating in feelings of superiority' (Barnes 2011: 387). Despite the Western impact on the production of Chinese export objects, these products were taken by many in the West 'at face value' (Pagani 1998: 33). In the West, these objects were thus seen to reflect Chinese culture, and at the extreme to reflect the 'moral character of the Chinese' (Pagani 1998: 33). Therefore, the East Asian material culture produced at this time both instigated and reflected Western stereotypes. Imitation ceramic objects produced in Western factories were also no exception to this stereotyping. Chinese commodities thus came to symbolise an invented conception of Chinese culture and society in the Western imagination. These objects have consequently in many cases been enveloped into Western culture. For this reason, Chinese material culture is at times perceived as 'British' in origin, overlooking the cultural context from which it actually originated (Clunas 1997: 12; Pierson 2019b).

The Role of Museums in Relations Between East Asia and the West

In the nineteenth century, exhibition was a popular method of portraying interpretations of the Chinese 'Other'. The public display of East Asian objects was

triggered by the commercial exhibition of Nathan Dunn's collection known as *The Chinese Collection* in the 1830s in Philadelphia and later in the 1850s in London (Pagani 1998: 34). The purpose of displaying this collection was to educate the public about China, however it reflected and consolidated distorted Western images of China, playing on the Western thirst for the exotic at this time (Barnes 2011: 391). The Chinese objects in Dunn's collection, were seen to be representative of Chinese culture. Commodity and culture thus became inseparably linked, and in his presentation of East Asian objects Nathan Dunn rendered Chinese culture into a commodity (Barnes 2011: 36). Consequently, it was believed that this exhibit allowed the public to experience 'all of China', including an assumption of Chinese society (Barnes 2011: 37). This exhibit became a tangible point of interaction between conflicting images of China in the nineteenth century; as an inferior nation and also as one which produced admired objects. During the mid-twentieth century, British reliance on Chinese goods dropped and Western interest in Chinese art decreased. Pagani (1998: 39) and Barnes (2011: 394) both conclude that the demand following the Opium Wars was over.

In the twentieth century, many East Asian collections displayed in Western museums received very little attention. In recent decades, this has begun to change, primarily as a result of community engagement initiatives with Chinese communities, alongside other programmes and initiatives which allow the visitor greater involvement with the collection. As a consequence, the displays of many East Asian collections are beginning to be revised and readdressed, an example being the redisplay of the British Museum's *Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery of China and South Asia* which reopened to the public in 2017 (The British Museum 2017).

Inspired by the possibilities to rethink display, this PhD project brings new understanding to how we might offer a more meaningful display of East Asian material in Irish collections.

Topic Three: Museums and Identity

The messages conveyed by the display of East Asian material in Western museums has become increasingly significant in today's complex societies. By interpreting a

society's history and heritage, museums help to sustain both personal identities and a sense of community identity (Crooke 2007). Today the museum can be seen as an educational institution, aimed at making a population conscious of its identity (Kreps 2003: 10). The contemporary museum thus maintains a greater role and responsibility to diverse communities than its nineteenth-century predecessor. There is reason to believe museum representations affect the perceptions of their audiences. Therefore, how museums depict migrant identities potentially will shape how people perceive immigrants and ethnic minorities (McDermott 2012).

The role of the contemporary museum is also the focus of much current criticism and debate, in regard to the interpretation and representation of identity. In the museum the concepts of interpretation, representation and identity are interlinked, as issues of interpretation and representation largely determine identity construction. Museum interpretation commences with the selection of objects, concepts, themes and storylines (Calder 2000: 41), as will later be explored in this chapter using the Museum of Scotland as an example. Consequently, museums are 'artificial constructions' and do not simply form 'logical collections' (Lidchi 1997: 160). They manufacture representations, assign value, meaning and identity in line with certain perspectives and classificatory schemes. Curators privilege certain sorts of material for collection and display, and as a result the public is given a 'distorted idea' in museum exhibits (Pearce 1992: 240). Museum interpretation can be seen as a 'construction produced by dominant social groups' (Pearce 1992: 234). Moreover, through the manufacture of meaning museums also harbour a political dimension (Johansson 2015: 154), and in recent years museums have been repeatedly criticised for the power relations involved in the dissemination of identity constructions (Sandell 2002: 9). It therefore becomes apparent that museums are not free from inherent difficulties. We must challenge the selection processes surrounding identity representation in museums, and 'who controls the means of representing' (Karp 1991: 15).

Exploring Identity

As a term, identity has been used with growing frequency in the museum sector in recent years (McLean and Newman 2002; Kreps 2003). However, identity research has largely been led by cultural studies and sociology scholars (Hall 1996; Castells

1997; Taylor 1997). Originally the term was mainly applied to individuals, but today it has increased application to a range of sources, particularly in relation to groups and collectives (Spencer and Wollman 2002: 58). Kreps (2003: 10) defines identity as the 'totality of images that a group has of itself, its past, present and future'. Similarly, Castells (1997: 6) understands identity as 'people's source of meaning and experience' and Taylor (1997: 20) regards identity to be 'the way we see ourselves in relation to other people'. Many definitions of identity focus on its relation to difference. It has been widely acknowledged that identity is constructed 'through the marking of difference' (McLean and Newman 2002: 58). Identity is not only fashioned by identifying with those considered similar but also by distinguishing oneself from those who are dissimilar (Spencer and Wollman 2002: 58). This factor of identity construction is especially relevant to the display of East Asian collections in a Western museum environment, as by nature the collections are presented in a cultural setting which differs from that of their origin. Difference is ambivalent in the museum setting, as not only can it mobilise anxieties in the museum audience, but it is also to some extent necessary for the production of meaning and the construction of identity (McLean and Newman 2002: 59).

Hall (1996: 2) argues for the term identification, rather than identity, as he sees the former to be 'not as tricky and preferable' to the word identity itself. Identification is constructed through 'shared characteristics with another person or group', and functions only through its 'capacity to exclude' (Hall 1996: 2-5). By forging identities, we therefore also generate principles of exclusion. Hall distinguishes three different theories of identity, firstly the 'enlightenment view', this view of identity is individualist therefore each person is seen to be unique. Secondly, the 'sociological subject' emphasises that we only construct a sense of ourselves through interaction with others, and thirdly the 'postmodern subject' is seen to have different identities at different times (Hall 1996, cited by Taylor 1997: 21).

Within the current literature surrounding identity, two broad understandings of it thus become apparent. The first is an 'essentialist view' which suggests that identity does not change over time and is therefore fixed (McLean and Newman 2002: 57). Contrastingly a 'contemporary view' of identity sees it change over time, and alter in relation to particular contexts (McLean and Newman 2002: 57). Differences also

exist in the definitions of social (group) identity and personal (individual) identity. Social identity refers to feelings of similarity towards others, and conversely personal identity refers to feelings of difference in relation to the same others (Deschamps and Devos 1998: 3). The many divergent markers of identity alongside ideas of difference are important to consider in regard to each of the four East Asian collections discussed in this study. They each have been collected by Western male collectors, thus the context of the collector plays a prominent role in each of the displays (further discussed in Chapters Three and Seven). As a result, in this research I argue that it is imperative that the cultural origins of these objects are also expressed, otherwise they would become only a marker of Western identity in contrast to their East Asian origins. This highlights the differences and dissimilarities which are existent between the cultural origin of these objects and the cultural location in which they now reside.

Constructing Identity, Value and Meaning through Museum Objects

Museums have always played a role in defining the identity of individuals and groups, as a place where people go to 'actively make and remake their identities' (McLean and Newman 2002: 58). Although, the mechanisms through which identity construction occurs are only recently beginning to be understood. When applied to museum experiences, identity construction goes beyond learning about history and material culture, and instead entails the processing of ideas relating to individual and collective beliefs about the world. The construction of identity in museums, places individuals as the 'subject matter' and uses objects and collections to 'trigger exploration' (Garner, Kaplan and Pugh 2016: 341). Museum visitors often assign complicated and conflicting meanings to museum objects, which are representative of each individuals' identity (McLean and Newman 2002: 58). Therefore, in relation to contemporary understandings of identity construction, a multiplicity of points of view need to be recognised in order to facilitate contrasting and conflicting identity formations. In this sense, the role of the museum is to enable individuals to be aware of and name these multiple strands of meaning (Kreps 2003: 10).

The points of view which are not recognised by museum exhibitions are as significant as those included, especially in relation to minority groups, as 'a lack of sense of self or loss of identity' is associated with exclusion from society (McLean

and Newman 2002: 57). Section Two of this PhD thesis will later highlight the diversity of narratives and contexts which can be embedded in a single museum object. It will be found that objects residing in the four case study collections embody many convergent layers of identity, and many of these identities have been overlooked in current museum displays. This includes (but is not limited to): the cultural identity of their place of origin, the community identities of their makers, the social identities of those who traded them, and the personal identity of their collectors.

In all cases, the identity constructed through a museum object is a result of the meaning and value it can be seen to embody; this value is never inherent in the object itself. Objects are given meaning and value by our use of them, through what we 'say, think and feel about them' (Hall 1997: 3). In museums, the interpretation of an object arises from interaction between the object and the mind of the viewer. The meaning and value constructed is an individual interpretation, and is 'not the true meaning of the object' (Pearce 1992: 220). These object values are dependant not only on social, historical and geographical fields of usage, but also on the shifts in ownership 'between private collectors and public institutions' (Shelton 2000: 155).

Object meanings become particularly complex when they have been collected. As previously alluded to, collections reflect not only the broader culture and society which created and used them, but also the identity of their collectors. A result is that every collection is necessarily partial, and contains an inbuilt set of biases which correspond to the 'collector's intellectual or emotional ideals' (Shelton 2000: 155). A person from the originating culture may therefore feel patronised, and that their identities have been impaired, by the 'token collecting' of someone from a different culture (Keene 2005: 92). Collecting processes consequently transform objects. However, when objects enter a museum they are transformed further into a museum archive, and then again by exhibition processes. The four collections discussed in this study have each been transformed by the preferences of their collector, and additionally by the museum in which they now reside.

Constructing Ethnic Identity Through Museum Objects and Museum Representations of East Asia

Alongside the personal identities of the individuals who collected and used them, museum objects are also significant sources in the forging of 'national, regional and ethnic identities' (Kreps 2003: 2). Material culture in particular is frequently implicated in the recognition and expression of ethnicity, as it plays a vital role in the development of ethnic identities through its symbolic attributes (Jones 1997: 120). Distinctive forms and styles of objects become actively employed in the process of signalling ethnicity, these objects become collective symbols or emblems of ethnic identities and for particular geographic locations (Jones 1997: 120). It is for this reason that the East Asian collections displayed in Ireland can be seen as emblems of Chinese society and culture more broadly, and as such become representations of East Asia which will affect the perceptions of the museum audience.

The needs of ethnically diverse museum audiences, have produced questions surrounding the authority of the dominant groups in society. Thus, as mentioned previously, discussions surrounding museum identity representation reflect deeper judgements of power and authority (Karp and Lavine 1991: 1). Within museum exhibitions certain elements are silenced in order to create comprehensive interpretations, thus museum object meanings 'are rarely without a political dimension' (Bolton 2003: 42). There exists a contemporary tendency to subordinate the representation of the significance of objects in museum text panels, imposing on them with dominant social classification systems (Shelton 2000: 155). The politics of representation in museum spaces is therefore formed in terms of hierarchical relationships between texts and objects, where texts dominate 'the construction of knowledge' (Hallam 2000: 270). Furthermore, it is through artefacts from 'other' cultures that museums begin to interpret cultural meanings. Artefacts in museums today accordingly function as contact zones between cultures, by 'embodying local knowledge and histories' (Peers and Brown 2003: 5). These meanings although perhaps at times overlapping, tend to be interpreted very differently by museums and source communities. For this reason, museums provide experiences of objects that do not bear any resemblance to what their makers intended. Consequently, a critique of museums from the standpoint of the politics of collecting, regards them as

unable to address the fact that many objects have entered into Western collections through unequal relations of power (Lidchi 1997: 167).

An example of the selection processes which museums are faced with when constructing exhibitions, can be seen through the Museum of Scotland's display strategies. The museum has noted that when building their new galleries interpretation began with the selection of objects, concepts, themes and storylines (Calder 2000: 41). Curator of the Museum of Scotland Jenni Calder (2000: 43) describes how in 2000, when the museum was going through a redisplay, the information presented to the public had to be confined, in order to present a coherent and relevant story. The museum contains a huge amount of material, so constraint was necessary in order to accommodate the amount of information each visitor could presumably take in. The museum is aware that the downside of selection and leaving aspects out, is that some museum visitors will feel 'short-changed' (Calder 2000: 45). Additionally, certain identity representations will also be unintentionally and unavoidably excluded. However, they regard this as an inevitable result of presenting a coherent storyline and reasonable exhibits. This factor equally affects the collections discussed in this study, particularly in the case of the Chester Beatty Library, where only one percent of collections are on display at any given time.

The process of selection in regard to object meanings is one which is inevitable for museum objects placed on display. However, the multiple voices and identities in a society make museum debates on interpretation and representation complicated. A distinction therefore needs to be made between the current meanings of a museum object and additional meanings that may no longer be intact. As mentioned, in recent years emphasis has shifted from concerns regarding the representation of 'other' cultures, towards the representation of multiple identities (Hallam and Street 2000: 4). These demands have been potentially challenging for museums. It can be difficult for the museum curator, who will usually be a member of the dominant social group in society, to discard their own values and describe another culture without unwittingly projecting their own ideals. Comparable to all other museum functions, display therefore inevitably draws upon the cultural assumptions of institutions and curators (Karp and Lavine 1991: 1). This makes the representation of multiple identities in displays all the more prevalent. Only through the inclusion of each of the

layers of identity which the East Asian collections displayed in Ireland can be seen to represent, can they then adequately move away from the authority of Western society's dominant group.

Revolutionising Museum Display Practices in Line with Contemporary Understandings of Identity Construction

Changes in exhibition philosophies are needed if museums are to address the requirements initiated by contemporary conceptions of identity. Not all museum exhibitions deny the representation of multiple identities, but all do impose certain contexts of interpretation, selection and representation and thus cannot avoid these challenges. Museums have therefore been accused of generating an 'institutionalised rationalisation of the past' (Walsh 1992: 176), by removing exhibited material from the daily experiences of people. The larger point is that no matter how exhibitions are structured there is always room for them to be challenged, because of their very nature as outlets for displaying culture. Museums will therefore continuously face charges about who has the right to control the exhibition and how identities are defined in it. Accordingly, groups in society that are attempting to 'maintain a sense of community and assert their social, political and cultural identities in the larger world', rightfully challenge the museum's control in exhibiting and representing their cultures (Karp and Lavine 1991: 1).

Consequently, participation has become a key word in museum functioning. The new museology movement is largely about giving people control over their cultural heritage and its preservation, and allowing this heritage to be a part of how communities construct their identities (Kreps 2003: 10). It moves beyond striving to expand collections, and instead focusses on the contextualisation of the objects on display. This movement is definitely reflected in the collections explored in this study, particularly in regard to the workshops and programmes which run alongside the displays (further discussed in Chapter Six), as these enable the displays to reach a wider audience.

One way of improving the representation and understanding of cultural objects is therefore to involve the public in producing and interpreting exhibitions. However, it is significant to note that multi-vocal exhibitions also contain their own distinctive risks.

Phillips (2003: 166) has observed that most museum visitors are conditioned to expect ‘clarity, simplicity, inspiration and pleasure’ in museum exhibits. Conversely multi-vocal exhibits endeavour to present complexity and contradiction, and thus risk ‘confusing or frustrating’ visitors (Phillips 2003: 166). Accordingly, it was for similar reasons that the Museum of Scotland, as previously discussed, has chosen to present limited information in displays. Although by allowing the inclusion of multiple voices in displays, museums present a realistic interpretation of history, as in cultures more than one way of interpreting or representing objects will always exist (Hall 1997: 2). Correspondingly, this PhD study is dedicated to highlighting the advantages of incorporating multiple narratives, and equally a multidisciplinary approach to museum interpretation and display practices.

At present, it is likely that the interpretation and representation of identity in the museum space will remain contested and a challenge. From the various arguments explored, it appears that in any form of museum exhibition there will be a corresponding marginalisation of other identities and perspectives. However, museum exhibitions remain the primary method of communicating representations and an understanding of the world. They either aid or impede identity formation. The design and arrangement of objects in museum exhibitions consequently remains a primary element in building the relations between museums and communities, and in representing multiple voices and identities.

Topic Four: Museum Narrative

Much current academic discussion surrounding narrative, considers the term in relation to text and literature; consequently, many of the overall definitions of narrative are difficult to apply to the context of museums. In the past narrative has typically been employed in museum studies as a means of unfolding the educational function of the museum. Most notably Roberts’ (1997: 137) seminal text *From Knowledge to Narrative*, explores narrative as a tool for describing the nature of education in museums. Narrating and ordering the world has been central to the educational function of the museum, since its inception in the Enlightenment period (Robins and Baxter 2012: 247). However, moving on from this foundation much recent debate has explored the use of narrative in other aspects of museum work,

this includes: museum text, the notion of the museum meta-narrative, exhibition design, museum display, narratives in collections, and the use of narrative as an interpretive strategy. It is also significant to note, that much recent debate is divided in its recognition of narrative as a positive implement in the museum, these innovative and conflicting opinions will later be examined. Therefore, by exploring the various meanings of narrative in museum practice, it becomes apparent that this one term has many diverse functions. This section aims to dispel any confusion surrounding the diverse definitions and uses of narrative in the museum context.

Definitions of Narrative

The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative (Abbott 2002) and *Narratology* (Bal 2009), the two seminal texts on narrative, focus on literature, providing only a limited application to the study of museums. Simply put narrative is the representation of an event, or a series of events (Abbott 2002: 13). It is the principal way in which we organise our understanding of time (Abbott 2002: 3), therefore narrative is part of the way humans apprehend the world (Abbott 2002: 4). The definition of narratology is equally important, as the term has a considerably different meaning to narrative. The term relates to the theories surrounding narratives. It was coined by Bal (2009: 3) in order to advance an understanding, evaluation and analysis of narratives, specifically narratives within literature. However, these definitions still leave an unclear connection between narrative and museum practice; beyond the fact that both museums and narrative literature can possibly be seen to represent events, and to reflect human understanding. I argue that there is a need for a far deeper examination of narrative in the museum setting, which this thesis hopes to provide.

Applying Narrative Theory to the Museum

It is perhaps through the work of Bruner (1990, 1991, 2004) that the link can be found between the wider debates surrounding narrative, and the use of the term in museum practice. Bruner (1991: 4) argues that we organise our experience and memory in the form of narrative, and thus defines narrative as an ‘account of events occurring over time’ (Bruner 1991: 6). Narrative therefore has a number of features, including that it can be real or imaginary without losing ‘its power on a story’, and that it can forge links between the ‘exceptional and the ordinary’ (Bruner 1990: 47). When a narrative outlook is taken it can then be asked why one story was chosen or

constructed over another (Bruner 1990: 114), as within existing narratives a multiplicity of alternative stories always unfold. This is where Bruner (1991: 7) begins to link narrative to culture, as he believes that narratives are inextricably linked to the storytellers 'beliefs, desires, theories and values'. Accordingly, Bruner (2004: 694) argues that narrative is an important way to characterise culture. Although what needs to be taken into consideration here, is the ambiguity of the term narrative, as Bruner uses narrative to refer to both the story itself and to the telling of the story, thus for Bruner the story and telling are inseparably connected.

Many links exist between Bruner's work, and the current research surrounding museum narrative. Firstly, the characteristics of storytelling discussed in Bruner's *Acts of Meaning* (1990), have been directly related to museums by many scholars and practitioners working hin this field. Subsequently Bruner's theory, that humans make sense of the world and themselves through narrative, has been commonly applied to a variety of museum functions: learning, interpretation and display. Stokes-Rees (2011: 339-340) applies this theory to museum display. In observing how humans make sense of the world and themselves through narratives, Stokes-Rees (2011: 339) argues that it is likewise through constructing a narrative in displays, that museums too make sense of the world and communicate knowledge.

Bedford (2001) also draws on the characteristics of storytelling discussed in *Acts of Meaning* (Bruner 1990), and applies this to how people learn in museums. Bedford (2001: 28) makes this link by maintaining that both storytelling and history, use narrative to make sense of the world. Bedford believes that stories are 'fundamental to the way we learn' (Bedford 2001: 33). Therefore, that the narrative portrayal of history in museums, allows the 'listener' to imagine another time and place (Bedford 2001: 34), and thus learn from this experience. Likewise, Skolnick (2012: 86) also considers this storytelling attribute of narrative, and applies it to interpretation. For Skolnick (2012: 86) both narrative and interpretation are constructed, by 'selecting, gathering and reassembling information and evidence in the framework of our own ideas'. This establishes that there are parallels in the constructed natures of world narratives, personal narratives and museum narratives. Therefore, the basis of Skolnick's argument is that in the museum we must understand narrative as a

constructed ‘means of interpretation’, which can only ever present a segment of the whole story (Skolnick 2012: 86).

Other aspects of Bruner’s work, have similarly been applied to the role of narrative in museums. Bedford (2001: 29) has explored Bruner’s argument, that all narratives encompass a point of view and a moral stance, and has applied this to museum narratives. Bedford (2001: 29) concludes that in many cases museum narratives ‘represent something much larger’. At times museum narratives take a national stance towards a topic, or represent another time or place through a select assemblage of objects, and by doing this represent only one of many viewpoints. Therefore, museum narratives indicate the museum’s viewpoint, and (perhaps moral) stance toward a story. Bedford (2001: 29) determines that all museums are storytellers, and that they ‘exist because once upon a time some person or group believed there was a story worth telling over and over, for generations to come’.

In addition, Roberts (1997: 134) examines Bruner’s concept of story creation and the establishment of ‘not truth but meaning’ in narrative constructions. Roberts (1997: 133) then applies this element to the making of meaning, in the ‘educational enterprise’ of museums. Roberts (1997: 137) uses Bruner’s theory of narrative to describe the educational strategies of museums as well as to describe the countless meaning-making activities employed by curators and visitors, as they interpret and structure the museum. In the same way Austin (2012: 108) has explored the constructivist position of Bruner’s work, and has applied this to museum exhibits. Austin (2012: 108) argues that stories are ‘developed from the interplay between self, others and the world’. Within museum experiences and exhibitions, we thus make sense of and interpret what we see through connections between self, others and the wider world (Austin 2012: 108). Austin (2012: 110) believes that viewing museum exhibits as narrative environments is a progressive outlook, and that it will help to ‘produce new analytical models and creative methods’. It is significant to note here, that Bruner’s theories have generally been used in a positive way by museum scholars. However, the overall use of narrative in the museum context is not always seen to be so favourable, as will later be explored.

Connections Between Narrative and Museum Interpretation

In exploring the various uses of narrative in a museum context, it has become apparent that the term (like the concept of identity) is inextricably linked to museum interpretation. Museum studies scholars and practitioners frequently use the term interpretation to describe a museum function. This function is the construction of an understanding of the world, and the production of knowledge (Hooper-Greenhill 1994c: 12). Accordingly, a task of museum curators is to produce interpretations for visitors, by displaying and classifying groups of objects. Therefore, allowing visitors to then deploy their own interpretative strategies, in making sense of these objects (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 124). Telling stories is consequently a fundamental aspect of interpretative practice (Nielsen 2017: 445), and this is where interpretation and narrative become linked. From this viewpoint, it becomes evident that by interpreting objects museums essentially intend for visitors to engage with the museum's storytelling process though participation and engagement with the museum's stories, which then leads to the structuring their own stories (Nielsen 2017: 445). As a result, narratives are central to interpretative space and it is through stories that objects from the past can be given a future (Greenberg 2012: 103).

However, it has been noted by Roberts (1997: 75), that although museum exhibition strategies are primarily interpretative, museums have been 'slow to share this fact with the viewing public'. Questions regarding which stories collections tell, which they dismiss, and who controls their interpretation thus arise. This leads us to the criticism surrounding the constructed nature of museum narratives, which will be explored in this PhD study in relation to East Asian collections in Irish museums.

Criticism of Museum Narratives

The constructed nature of narratives, and the tendency for museums to create a dominant meta-narrative or master narrative, has been at the heart of much criticism in recent years. Perhaps one of the most significant critiques, or at least one of the earliest, regarding the constructed nature of museum master narratives, has been provided by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000). Hooper-Greenhill (2000: 140) poses that many museum master narratives have demonstrated both the 'primacy of the male', and the 'Eurocentric core' of much of the history we 'take for granted in the West'. Hooper-Greenhill (2000: 141) describes master narratives a the 'dominant

canons' that countless museums in the West signify. Accordingly, assemblages of objects in museums construct conceptual storylines and present visual pictures, which then in turn construct authoritative narratives: master narratives. The choice of objects displayed, and their placing into groups by curators in order to produce knowledge, is thus one of the most vital functions of the museum (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 77). However, it is significant to highlight that the museum narratives constructed through object assemblages, are also 'embedded in other social narratives' (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 78). As a result, Hooper-Greenhill (2000: 77) sees the need for caution in approaching museological narratives, as collections 'are themselves partially framed by stories that are written elsewhere'. Therefore, what these narratives do not take into account, is that the social meanings of objects change over time even if their authoritative museum narratives remain static.

This standpoint towards museum narrative, has also been reflected in recent museum debate. Hanks (2012: 31) has discussed that, just as for novelists, the creation of a coherent master narrative is found amongst museum exhibition designers. Hanks believes that the traditional role of the curator as an authoritative narrator, reflecting Hooper-Greenhill's stance twelve years prior, is still relevant. However, this role is now tempered 'by the addition of new voices telling their own stories' (Hanks 2012: 31). These additional viewpoints and opinions need to be taken into consideration, to ensure that the museum environment is not excluding and omissive. Underneath museum overarching storylines thus lie individual voices (Hanks 2012: 30), and it is imperative not to neglect these.

An example of how museum narratives have been impacted by authority can be found at the Hong Kong Museum of History, as this museum represents a 'unique national image' (Stokes-Rees 2011: 347). The master narrative presented by this museum situates it in a story of its own context, rather than in the wider context of its collections, and in doing so presents a singular viewpoint to its visitors. National narratives in particular often overlook conflicting voices in the construction of an authoritative national image. Stokes-Rees (2011: 102) explores the narratives fabricated by this museum, and comes to the conclusion that by making the museum's visual narratives (its collections and displays) public, it has achieved an 'authority' which will remain dominant for many years, regardless of its exclusionary

viewpoint. Many examples of an authoritative (national) narrative like the narrative presented in the Hong Kong Museum of History, can be observed in museums throughout the world: including the Irish case studies discussed in this thesis. Each of the case studies in this thesis have to differing extents associated their East Asian collections to the context of Ireland; predominately through the biographies of their collectors. Museum exhibitions commonly reflect the dominant identities in society, and often focus representations on the museum's geographic location. However, in order to do so the decision to exclude incompatible contexts and voices is often made. Instead using collections to construct a master narrative of the museum itself, and to represent the museum's own institutional mission. Through such uses of narrative, the 'dominant canons' previously noted by Hooper-Greenhill (2000: 77) become evident, as the objects and collections have been appropriated through the lens of the dominant society in these encounters.

Museum narratives also present many further challenges and issues. Including the reality that many museum stories regarding people places and experiences from the past are commonly told in the past tense. This places these accounts in a 'temporal framework', and at times completely separating these narratives from any links to the present (Witcomb 2012: 45). Another challenge arises from the fact that museum narratives will be observed by a multitude of diverse visitors, each coming from different backgrounds and circumstances. Museum visitors therefore may have a very different 'heritage identification' to the one presented by the museum, and consequently may find particular narratives hard to understand or connect with (Chronis 2012: 465). Additional challenges result from the certainty, that many museum narratives imbue objects with the history of their past owners and makers. Thus, transforming objects into partial 'traces of stories in the present which communicate the past' (Walklate 2012: 14). This calls into question processes of value assumption, particularly if the object is only regarded as valuable and significant due to its association with a past collector, owner or maker.

The use of text in museums has also been at the core of much reproach in recent museum debates surrounding narrative. It can be said that in museum narratives, 'interpretation implies a narrator' (Chatman 1975: 259). For this reason, we may feel the existence of a narrator in museums, which in turn may affect our engagement

with museum narratives. It has been noted by Foster and Coulson (2012: 228) that although most museum texts and labels are unsigned, ‘we know that someone has written them’. Museum labels and texts can be seen as a combination of the ‘reliable voice’ of a museum, and the ‘empathetic words’ of an individual (Foster and Coulson 2012: 228). Therefore, museum professionals who tell the narratives of exhibits and collections, are seldom recognised in the same way as other authors. As a result, the background, influences and personal standpoints of curators are not acknowledged in museum texts. Conversely, these aspects are commonly apparent in texts by authors and editors, through mediums like the synopsis of a text or the biography of a writer (Foster and Coulson 2012: 228). In museum exhibits we therefore do not have the ‘critical context’ given when reading many other types of narrative (Foster and Coulson 2012: 228). Instead the voice of the museum is largely perceived or experienced as authoritative and trustworthy, as has previously been noted.

Nevertheless, including the voices of museum curators in an exhibition, ‘could mean visitors feel more at ease with their own efforts to make sense of what they see’ (Foster and Coulson 2012: 228). Acknowledging incomplete stories could be a way to encourage debates surrounding accepted narratives and could become a means of questioning the role of constructed museum narratives. It needs to be acknowledged that the past can be seen to be ‘fiction’, as narratives are the consequence of ‘selective editing which can mean falsification’ (Foster and Coulson 2012: 229). This corresponds to Bruner’s (1996: 91) theory that ‘history simply never happens; it is constructed by historians’, again highlighting the constructed nature of historical narratives and museum narratives. It is imperative that museums empower their visitors to become more critical of the narratives they present.

Chapter Two Conclusion

In exploring the four museum collections in Ireland (Topic One), it has become apparent that commonalities exist in the lives of the collectors and in the journey of objects from East Asia to the West; such as the prominent role of art dealers. However, existing literature primarily focusses on the biographies of the collectors. This PhD research will explore an entirely new aspect of each of these collections, enabling them to be seen in a new light. For the first time, the exhibition strategies

taken to display these collections and the objects in them will become the focus of study. In doing so this research will contribute original and significant knowledge by addressing a gap in the current literature. Additionally, this research project will add further value to the collections as a result of establishing alternative strands of meaning regarding their histories. Also by establishing new sources of background information regarding the objects in each collection, which have in many instances previously been overlooked.

The second area of examination in this chapter, concerning relations between East Asia and the West, has revealed that for centuries the West has had a misinformed and sometimes derogatory image of China (Topic Two). This research project addresses gaps in our understanding of how relations between East Asia and the West have shaped the interpretation and display of East Asian museum collections in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The discussion of museums and identity (Topic Three) demonstrated that it is through a system of knowledge classification and presentation that museum objects play a key role in shaping both individual and collective (social) identities. When museums interpret objects and collections, the formation of identity is at risk. Issues regarding interpretation in museums therefore not only relate to the construction of museum displays, but also to the relationships between museums and communities (Simpson 2001: 3). An awareness of the importance of museum collections to identity construction and representation will thus be fundamental to examining the interpretation and display strategies surrounding East Asian collections displayed in Ireland in this study.

Finally, Topic Four focussed on the area of narrative. Through this exploration it became apparent that our perception of ourselves and the world around us is largely structured through stories, and that this influence of narrative extends to the museum. Museum narratives are also human constructions, which have been fabricated by an agent or a storyteller, and as a result reflect the social and cultural features of their production. Museum collections can similarly be seen to be human constructions, reflecting both objective and subjective views of the world. When confronted with arrangements of objects in museums, it also appears to be natural

for museum visitors to construct a ‘human story’ (Hale 2012: 199). The constructed nature of these stories (through collections, museums and visitors) necessitate processes of exclusion and editing, with all the associated threats of partiality and misrepresentation. In the formation of museum narratives, ‘dissonant voices’ are thus often silenced (MacLeod, Hanks and Hale 2012: xxii). Given that museum narrative is constructed, it is therefore also contested. The problematic nature of museum narrative is addressed in this PhD research, through an examination of the social, cultural and political ideologies underpinning the narration of East Asian collections in Museums in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Section One: Museum Display and its Functions

This section is comprised of Chapters Three to Six, which together form one of two substantial areas in this thesis (the first area being museum display and the second being museum objects).

The public display of collections has always been, remains and will probably continue to be fundamental to museum institutional identity. For the museum visitor, the exhibition environment is the 'primary medium of communication' (Dean 1996: 30). Exhibitions are a purposeful means of engaging and affecting visitor's attitudes, values and awareness of the world (Tang and Mayrand 2014: 293). This is an exceptionally prominent factor in regard to East Asian collections. As it can be presumed that the East Asian displays presented in the West, and the understandings of them grasped by their audience, will largely determine visitor perceptions of certain periods in particular ways such as Chinese history, Chinese material culture and perhaps an understanding of the construct of China itself. However, in displaying objects museums do not offer an unmediated experience of the objects they collect. Instead as Barker (1999: 8) suggests, museums should be considered as 'cultures of display'. This is because various social, cultural and political ideologies shape museum functioning.

In conducting the research presented in Section One, a number of additional areas were explored, but not included in the chapters to follow. This includes a detailed comparison of the display strategies utilised for East Asian art displays in Ireland, and those of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Museum; displays often utilised as examples of best practice by museum curators and professionals across the United Kingdom and Ireland. Furthermore, a comparison between the origins of East Asian and Western museum spaces was also completed but not included in the chapters to follow, although these excluded areas provide significant contextual information in the area of (East Asian) museum display, they deviated from the focus, as this project aims to specifically explore the East Asian collections displayed in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Before furthering an examination of the display of East Asian collections in Ireland it is first important to clarify definitions of key terms used in this section of the study, as these words are commonly used interchangeably but hold distinct differences. Display is defined as the ‘presentation of objects for public view’ (Belcher 1991: 37), exhibit as the assemblage of ‘objects and interpretative materials that form a unified entity’, and exhibition is the combination of all elements that form a ‘cohesive presentation of collections and information for public use’ (Dean 1996: 30). Museum exhibitions can accordingly be defined as spaces to encounter objects, and as a leisurely means of digesting information. As a consequence, the purpose of museum exhibitions is ‘to affect the visitor in some predetermined way’ (Belcher 1991: 37). Museum exhibitions typically aim to transform some aspect of visitors’ interests or attitudes effectively, due to the discovery of some level of meaning.

Chapter Three
Museum Display: Narrative, Lighting, Colour and Text

Museum display is a significant element in determining how collections are seen, understood and recalled by museum curators and visitors. Regardless of the aspects each of the collections explored in this PhD share, their display strategies ensure that they are each perceived differently. Museum displays present selected strands of information surrounding what are determined to be the social, cultural and political contexts of the collections. Unravelling the display strategies surrounding East Asian collections in museum spaces in Ireland is an important method of determining how museum visitors experience East Asian history and culture. Beyond Ireland, exploration of the histories and current practices surrounding public display has 'developed rapidly in the last twenty years' (Cullen 2012: 2). There is opportunity for this research to be extended, to further explore the display practices of museum spaces in Ireland. Particularly in regard to East Asian collections, in museums in Ireland.

The discussions in this chapter are informed by a close reading of the displays in the four museums, using theoretical literature to shape my critique. The interviews conducted with the curators responsible for each of the four museum collections, as well as visits to each museum, were a significant source for this chapter. Here a great deal of insight was gathered into the individual display and narration practices utilised in each of the case studies, and how these practices are perceived by the visitor. Curators shared approaches with regard to display traits such as lighting, colour, the spatial placement of objects and textual aids, which is reflected in the discussion in this chapter.

Museum Display as a Practice

The practice of publicly displaying collections of objects evolved from seventeenth-century cabinets of curiosities, leading to nineteenth-century world fairs and expositions. Advances in display and design communication could also be seen in nineteenth and early twentieth-century department stores (Lorenc, Skolnick and Berger 2007: 17). Modern museum and gallery display techniques, are greatly

influenced by the art and design movements of the early twentieth century. The ideologies of this period caused designers to rethink the elements of design, so that the walls and flooring of exhibition spaces were considered as ‘planes’, which affected the overall display (Hughes 2010: 14). These new approaches stressed the importance of combining both aesthetics and functionality in exhibition spaces (Hughes 2010: 14). Today display practices have advanced further, adding an experience component into already existing functionality and aesthetic roles (Hughes 2010: 78). Now display strategies emphasise the importance of presenting methods, which alter visitors’ perceptions of the objects presented.

Allowing access to collections by displaying them in public museum spaces has many benefits. Exhibitions, often thought of as a museum’s ‘main attraction’ (Lord 2014: 8), facilitate an encounter between the museum visitor and ‘authentic’ objects. Museum visitors respond to the ‘real thing’ with a special respect that is not given to images, pieces of text or virtual outlets (Ambrose and Paine 2012: 67). The three-dimensional quality of exhibitions is also important, it can allow the visitor to view objects from all angles and fully experience their qualities (Belcher 1991: 38). Further advantages of museum displays are that they can reach a large number of different people at the one time (thus they are cost affective), and that visitors can use displays at their own pace and level of interest (Ambrose and Paine 2012: 67).

In every exhibition project the limitations of museum displays also need to be recognised. Displays can be tiring for visitors, also there is no requirement for visitors to look at displays, read the text included, or learn from the story being told. Additionally, exploring objects and collections in museum display structures is a culturally, socially and politically influenced method of seeing, and for this reason voice has emerged as a critical issue in the design of museum displays (Lavine 1991: 151). This highlights the prevalence of the representation and inclusion of multiple narratives in contemporary museum practices. The issues of voice (or context) therefore present challenges when planning and implementing museum interpretation strategies. This theme will be discussed further later in this chapter.

Two further limitations for the visitor experience are display case itself and the artificial environment of the museum. Each of the displays explored in this study

place the objects into surroundings which are very different to the habitats their original makers intended for them. Moreover, each of the four collections explored in this study utilise display cases to present the objects. The museum display case presents a physical and psychological barrier between museum objects and visitors (Belcher 1991: 122). Nevertheless, display cases remain to be a prominent feature of museum exhibitions because of their many important benefits. Including providing an environmentally controlled micro-climate, and positioning objects in a way which allows them to be clearly viewed (Ambrose and Paine 2012: 67).

Designing and Interpreting an Exhibition

Planning and designing an exhibition is a complex and multi-layered procedure (Bogle 2013: 1). It consists of the completion of many stages before the final exhibition can be achieved. Within contemporary museum practice one stage in particular has emerged as both distinct to all other stages and imperative to contemporary practice: interpretative planning. This stage is significant as it allows exhibits to become more visitor centred alongside becoming more relevant, meaningful and relatable to visitors (Piacente 2014: 251). When museum visitors can relate to things personally, their level of interest is generally higher than if this were not the case. The interpretation of a collection therefore goes beyond the provision of facts, as a consequence it can be argued that interpretation is subjective practice which expresses only ‘personal views’ (Belcher 1991: 156).

The use of interpretation as a museum display strategy gained its popularity in the 1950s and was first implemented by museums in America (Belcher 1991: 155). Since then it has become a basic concept of the engaged museum, as static objects alone (without explanation, organisation, selection and the communication of information) do not support the engagement, learning and outreach missions which have become the focus of many of today’s museums. In relation to the museum, interpretation can consequently be defined as the exploration of an object and its significance. Interpretation is, moreover, a form of communication between museum staff and visitors which includes labels, text panels, exhibit designs, dioramas and electronic media. It is used to make an exhibition more stimulating, by providing a variety of learning and emotional experiences. Almost every time a curator places an object on display, they are interpreting it (Ambrose and Paine 2012: 63). In current

museum practice, it is believed that interpretation ‘enriches the visitor experience’ (Bridal 2013: 5). It achieves this by exploring themes related to the objects, allowing these objects to appeal to both young and adult learners, and primarily to tailor the exhibit to the museum’s target audience, and thus is a form of manipulation.

By implementing interpretive planning, museum designers become storytellers, concerned with constructing and structuring a good story (Burcaw 1997: 133). The role of the contemporary curator is to abstract, simplify and make interesting important information about objects and collections. The process of storyline development begins at the point of origin of an exhibition idea, and the overall story consists of everything a curatorial team believe should be known about an exhibition. Storyline development has become a prominent aspect of almost all exhibition designs. Burcaw (1997: 152) believes that in the contemporary Western museum experience, even visitors seeking ‘recreation’ also expect interpretation in displays, as they desire objects and concepts to be explained to them.

A result of the current trend for interpretation-driven exhibitions is that objects are no longer the primary focus of the museum. Instead objects retain significance only as ‘corroborative evidence’ (Lavine 1991: 152). Rather than shaping the exhibition, the reverse is true. By interpreting objects, curators and designers place constructions upon them. These constructions commonly exploit objects and collections as representations of a whole: whole eras, events, styles of object, cultures, societies or points in history. Interpretation becomes not only a statement about the object, but also about the culture it comes from (Baxandall 1991: 34). Museum visitors are therefore in a complicated position when they view objects from another culture. Their perceptions of this object will be influenced by a combination of their own ideas and values, the ideas and values presented in the exhibition and also the intended ideas, values and purposes of the object bestowed by its original makers.

As previously alluded to, the voice or storyline which an exhibition signifies is a complex matter. The polyvocal museum is an ambition which many museums are currently trying to achieve. A means of allowing the storylines surrounding collections to be more inclusive and representative of multiple voices, could be a change in focus, with less attention given to communicating and teaching the ideas surrounding

collections and more allocated to the possibilities surrounding the instillation of objects. By further exploring how multiple modes of viewing objects could be incorporated, exhibits could open up a multitude of ways in which collections could be interpreted (Alpers 1991: 31). Furthermore, incorporating layered interpretations of an object could allow the inclusion of multiple perspectives and alternate histories, allowing museum visitors to see a collection or an object in a new light with each varying strand of information (Molineux 2014: 123). This PhD project is dedicated to highlighting the advantages of including layered narratives in the four displays which are its focus. By including multiple strands of information in interpretation strategies, the four East Asian collections displayed in Ireland would become accessible to a wider diversity of audiences, and equally would represent a greater proportion of the identities and contexts which they can be seen to embody.

The Construction of Narrative across the Museum Sites

In regard to the four displays of East Asian collections explored in this study, the narratives or storylines which they currently present have been shaped by each collection's context and its accumulation by an individual. Turning first to the National Museum of Ireland example, *A Dubliner's Collection of Asian Art*, Albert Bender (the individual who gathered this collection) plays a prominent role in the collection's current interpretation and display. In a personal interview the curator of this exhibition described the overall narratives of this exhibition as being told in terms of 'individual more personal type stories' (interview with Whitty 2018). The primary function of the interpretative approach of this exhibit is to inform visitors of these stories. It can be argued that stories have a 'significant and lasting influence on us', they are key to our understanding of 'who we are' and 'what we are in relation to the rest of existence' (Vereaux and Griffin 2013: 1). In displaying the Bender collection Whitty has thus played on the power of a story and its ability to connect with museum visitors on a human and personal level. Stories are used to educate museum visitors on why Albert Bender and his collection are significant, alongside the fundamental identity constructions, ideas of self and interactions with others told through these narratives. Although narrative can be understood very simply as a story, it also 'implies a particular structure as a means for conveying what is told' (Vereaux and Griffin 2013: 1). In this case the story of Bender speaks of wider cultural connections between Ireland, Asia and California, it also speaks of a

personal connection between individuals with contrasting values (Bender as a Jew and Adolf Mahr, the NMI Director in the 1930s and a known Nazi), alongside the acceptance and merging of divergent cultural backgrounds and social identities.

The glass panel in the first room tells ‘the story of Albert’s brother Alfred Bender, the chief rabbi of Cape Town with the intention as described by the curator, ‘to show that there is this very strong Jewish link throughout all members of the Bender family’ (interview with Whitty 2018). In the next exhibition room, a similar glass panel (see Figure 3.1 below) reveals the connections between Adolf Mahr and Bender, with the aim here to demonstrate ‘the humanity of Albert Bender’ (interview with Whitty 2018). It is intended that this second exhibition gallery will present to visitors the unusual relationship forged between Bender and Mahr, which continued despite obvious anti-Semitism on the part of Mahr. This highlights the exceptional personal qualities of Bender that ‘he didn’t ask for anything to be handed back after the treatment given to him by Mahr’, in letters between the two men which displayed blatant anti-Semitism (interview with Whitty 2018). The story of the relations between Bender and Mahr was deliberately told ‘in all of its controversy’ (interview with Whitty 2018). Other less prominent narratives told in these exhibition spaces include Bender’s connection to and patronage of well-known artists and writers. Information surrounding the uses and backgrounds of the individual objects is also given on smaller text panels and labels, these are presented alongside the objects.

Figure 3.1 Glass panel within the Bender exhibition depicting Adolf Mahr, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin (2019). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

The Bender exhibition incorporates multiple narratives: including Bender's family history, the relationship between Bender and Mahr, the time period in which Bender's donations occurred, the context of Bender's Jewish upbringing and Mahr's position as leader of the Dublin Nazi party. The exhibition also explores Bender as a patron, Bender and Diego Rivera, Bender and Jack B. Yeats, Bender and Albert Russell, Eamon De Valera and Bender, and contextual information surrounding the objects displayed. The exhibition of the Bender collection therefore ensures that a

greater proportion of museum visitors will discover a narrative which interests and connects to them. However, it cannot be expected that all museum visitors will engage with every one of the objects and exhibition narratives they are presented with during a museum visit. Best practice in exhibition design recommends greater focus on individual 'preferences and interests' (Monti and Keene 2013: 10). As a result, the museum should aim to facilitate the visitor in selecting the terms of their interaction with the objects on display according to their individual personal interests. By providing a selection of diverse narratives which the visitor can pick up on, the Albert Bender exhibition has largely achieved this. It has created an opportunity for museum visitors to have a worthwhile visit, without having to encounter every object on display. Prompting visitors to focus on and enjoy the objects and narratives they are personally interested in. This experience was evident in the interviews conducted with museum visitors, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Turning to the Chester Beatty Library, its exhibitions utilise object interpretations heavily throughout the display. During a personal interview with the Chester Beatty Library's Head of Collections, the objects were described as holding 'overriding importance' in this exhibit (interview with Baldwin 2019). Accordingly, the curator responsible for the East Asian collection, again during a personal interview, stated that objects, cultures and religions play a more significant role in museum narratives than Chester Beatty, the individual who acquired the objects (interview with Redfern 2019). Unlike the National Museum of Ireland, the curators maintain that the individual biography of the collector does not play a significant role. Importance is 'placed on the collection more than the collector in terms of display' (interview with Redfern 2019). Although one section (a text panel and a display case presenting Beatty's Tudor bonnet) at the entrance of the exhibit does introduce Beatty's background and collecting habits, this narrative ends here and is not repeated throughout the exhibit. It is in the entrance to the museum that Chester Beatty is therefore primarily introduced, rather than in the display spaces (interview with Redfern 2019). This decision was put in place when designing the displays as the curators believed that the narrative of Alfred Chester Beatty's life would become 'extremely repetitive' for museum visitors (interview with Baldwin 2019). Therefore, Chester Beatty's life history has been given 'a limited role in the galleries' (interview with Redfern 2019). Instead it is hoped that by not focussing on Beatty, the breadth

and depth of his collection instead becomes apparent, ‘working to the strengths of the collection’ (interview with Redfern 2019). By placing emphasis on the objects, rather than informing the visitor about the life of Beatty, the museum aims to enable visitors to ‘learn about a world culture’ that they previously did not know, of and ‘hopefully find a connection’ (interview with Baldwin 2019).

The curators avoided a chronological narrative of Beatty’s life, deciding that it would have ‘become hard for the visitor to really engage in why they should come and see the collection’ (interview with Baldwin 2019). It is the ideal of most curators that museum visitors would approach the exhibition ‘with full awareness of the narratives on offer and of the object’s roles in relation to these’, although in reality this is very rarely the case (Monti and Keene 2013: 2). Rather, museum visitors perceive the most noticeable objects on display and make sense of them using their pre-existing knowledge (Monti and Keene 2013: 2). Careful attention must also be paid to the exhibition text due to the fact that visitors will often encounter labels out of sequence. Object and display text often needs to function independently of the entire exhibition. Research shows that the appearance of museum displays and objects contributes to the formation of visitor assumptions (Monti and Keene 2013: 2). This is evident in the Chester Beatty Library where great emphasis has been placed on the design of the exhibition space, including the groupings of objects, the colour, and the lighting as will later be discussed.

The overriding approach to narrative of the Hunt Museum display is again different. In this case the prevalence of the museum docents in the interpretation of these objects becomes evident. The primary method of interpretation of the East Asian collections is provided for the visitor through a guided tour lead by docents, all of whom are volunteers. These volunteer guides are self-taught experts in the collection, and their knowledge is highly valued by the institution. Therefore, from the onset it becomes apparent that the docent programme is more than just a volunteer scheme, and the individuals involved are primary stakeholders in the museum. Because of their contribution to knowledge, finance and also the day to day running of the museum (tours, events, workshops, educational programmes and staffing the gift shop), the docents are primary stakeholders and as much involved in the decisions made in the museum as the employed staff.

According to a current member of the museum's docent group, the Hunt Museum takes a very 'family' approach to its interpretative strategies (interview with Walsh 2019). However, this domestic approach does not stop here, as the display itself can also be described as somewhat domestic. The docents are not only vital in the organisation of the museum, but they also play a prominent role towards achieving the desired 'atmosphere' of the museum environment (interview with Walsh 2019). Similarly, a second docent who currently volunteers for the museum believes that the museum treats its staff and volunteers as 'very much a family' which is 'ironic because the whole collection came from a family', so the family atmosphere remains prevalent (interview with Macken 2019). Walsh (a museum docent) states that 'the docents are so important to the museum' because the Hunt family initially 'wanted to make the visitor feel as if they were coming to your house' (interview with Walsh 2019). The display case which the ceramic collection is presented in, enhances the domestic feel of the display as will later be explored. The museum is structured not as an orderly collection, but as a 'house of curiosities' (interview with Macken 2019). Therefore, the museum environment is 'a family environment and a domestic environment where you could open a drawer of curiosities and see the things, and just to kind of to feel at home really among the collection' (interview with Walsh 2019). With this decision, the Hunt Museum is displaying its East Asian ceramic collection very differently to the other collections discussed in this study.

During a personal interview, the Head of Exhibitions and Collections at the Hunt Museum confirmed that the display tactics implemented by the museum are 'very personal' and 'very domestic' (interview with O'Nolan 2019). The cases are intentionally very small, and 'there are things everywhere', including the 'delftware and the ceramics together in one room and mixed with other things in another' (interview with O'Nolan 2019). The style of display implemented is very deliberate, as it not only reflects the way the Hunt family had displayed the objects in their home, but the way the family wanted the objects to be displayed when the collection became established as its own museum. The minimal information given about the objects in labels and text panels was also something requested by the Hunt family, as 'they wanted people to look at them for their beauty and to see them not all as a whole' (interview with O'Nolan 2019). The objects are not displayed in groups or

categories, with like objects, but instead displayed in regard to their perceived aesthetic appeal. They have been presented in a way which highlights their aesthetic qualities, in packed display cases, encouraging the curiosity of the museum visitor to take a closer look. As the Hunt family ‘wanted them mixed up so that you could look at them differently, you could admire them differently’ (interview with O’Nolan 2019). This makes the display approach very different to the other museums discussed in this PhD. Compared to the O’Neill collection at the Ulster Museum for instance, the display of the Hunt collection is ‘purely aesthetic’ (interview with O’Nolan 2019). As one of the interviewees stated, the motive for implementing such an approach to the interpretation and display of objects is to ‘make them accessible to the community at large, not just to experts’ (interview with Macken 2019).

Also setting the Hunt Museum apart from the other collections discussed in this PhD, is the condition of the collection on display. Chapter Four will later discuss museum conservation procedures; thus, it is usual for museums to present objects in pristine conditions in environments which aid their preservation for future generations. In contrast, many of the objects displayed in the Hunt collection are heavily damaged with signs of wear and mistreatment. Objects in the collection were damaged in the Hunt household, as the Hunts’ ‘allowed everybody to come in and touch’ (interview with O’Nolan 2019). The objects now on display in the museum were used daily by the Hunt family, for example the museum includes a photograph (on one of the text panels) which shows the Hunt family cat sitting inside one of the Ming bowels currently on display. Consequently, an important characteristic of the collection was that the Hunt family ‘were not a bit possessive of it’ (interview with O’Nolan 2019).

This desire for it to be a working collection is evident in how it is used today, and a primary function is to ‘give access to students for education purposes’ (interview with O’Nolan 2019). According to the curator of this collection, John Hunt believed that Ireland was ‘behind with its heritage and culture because of just being suppressed for so many years’, and wanted to change this by allowing the public access to the Hunt family collection (interview with O’Nolan 2019). By turning a family collection into a museum, the Hunts were passing ownership of it from themselves to the wider community. It was hoped that the display would educate the younger generation and allow them an appreciation of the decorative arts (interview with O’Nolan 2019). By

taking a domestic interpretative approach, it is hoped that visitors will not find the displays intimidating and will not be ‘over awed’, as the collection is ‘spread out in a way that will not make visitors completely overwhelmed’ (interview with O’Nolan 2019). Also setting this example apart from the other museums discussed, the entire collection is on display. By doing so, the interpretation and display approach taken is therefore completely different from the approaches implemented by the Chester Beatty Library, the National Museum of Ireland and the Ulster Museum.

Turning now to the display of the *O’Neill Collection of Chinese Ceramics* in the Fine Art area of the Ulster Museum, the predominant interpretative strategy implemented in the museum is one of learning. The current display of this collection was designed by its curator (Kim Mawhinney: Head of Art, National Museums Northern Ireland), and was set up primarily to be used as a teaching resource. The function of this collection as a teaching resource became evident from the beginning of a personal interview I conducted with the curator of the O’Neill collection for this PhD. During this interview Mawhinney explains that it was intended ‘very specifically as a teaching aid’ for ‘students, art college students or researchers’ (interview with Mawhinney 2019). Therefore, from the onset it becomes clear that the intended audience for this display is the adult learner. It is also intended that this collection will teach visitors a general visual history of Chinese ceramics. As it shows ‘the variety from the Song dynasty right the way through to the Ming dynasty, including five very important pieces of Yongle period Ming’ (interview with Mawhinney 2019), although students (art students) remain the key audience in mind for this collection. The Ulster Museum closed for refurbishment between the years 2006-2009, prior to this period Mawhinney would have taken first-year ceramic students through the museum stores once a year to see this collection as a ‘teaching exercise’ (interview with Mawhinney 2019). Within the new design of the museum building which reopened to the public in 2009, this would no longer be possible because the stores were moved off site. Therefore, in order to continue to enable such visits, the collection was placed on display for the first time (in its current format), so that ‘ceramic tutors could bring the students’ and host ‘tours with students around this gallery’ (interview with Mawhinney 2019).

The use of the O'Neill collection as an educational resource is predominantly linked to and reflected in the spatial arrangement of the gallery. As is often the case within museum displays, the design of the exhibition works together with the museum architecture in shaping the experience of the space and its content (Monti and Keene 2013: 31). Museums often face great challenges in creating accessible spaces. For the Ulster Museum, this challenge encompassed not only making the space physically accessible but also intellectually accessible as a space for learning. The curatorial decisions made when displaying this collection enhance its learning potential, mostly enabled by how the O'Neill collection works alongside the other ceramic material. The O'Neill material has been strategically placed, making its spatial arrangement imperative to the narrative it conveys. The display case containing the *O'Neill Collection of Chinese Ceramics* is positioned beside blue and white delftware from Ireland. A connection is made with these two types of ceramic material. This placement is to show museum visitors 'what was being made as a response by Europeans when they saw the Chinese porcelain coming in, imported into Europe' (interview with Mawhinney 2019). On the opposite side of the collection, a case of studio pottery from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century has been displayed. This placement is thought to make a connection between 'old and new', connecting the O'Neill collection to contemporary ceramics, as 'studio pottery is seen as the birth of contemporary ceramics' (interview with Mawhinney 2019). It also renders connections between studio potters and the inspiration they took from ancient China. It is hoped that through the strategic placement of the two collections that visitors will perceive the history of studio pottery more vividly, as this style of ceramics 'mimicked the early Chinese and Japanese shape and also the glazing techniques' (interview with Mawhinney 2019).

In the case of the O'Neill display, the chosen format of the display case is central to achieving the educational goal of the exhibit. The collections curator employed an outside designer to create the display case: 'Click Netherfield' (interview with Mawhinney 2019). It appears that at the time of its construction, the design of the display case was innovative. Through the use of as much surrounding glass as possible, each case presented a new way of displaying the objects which did not obstruct the view of visitors, and thus was not a visual distraction. As a consequence, the objects can be viewed from 'each of the different sides' (interview

with Mawhinney 2019). The case utilises a ‘non-metal structure to hold the roof up’, therefore ‘it’s the glass itself that’s holding them up’ (interview with Mawhinney 2019). The style of the display case, with special attention given to its visual appearance and optical capacity, is part and parcel of the overriding aesthetic focus of the display. By creating a case from which visitors can experience an unobstructed view of the collection, visitors can therefore clearly observe the objects and the visual connections they hold to the studio pottery and delftware displays presented nearby. Within the case the objects are consequently presented ‘quite subtly’ for ‘their aesthetic appeal’ (interview with Mawhinney 2019).

Comparing and Contrasting Approaches to Exhibition Design

Thus far this chapter has discussed the interpretative strategies and narratives used in each of the four displays. In doing so it has become evident that despite having broadly similar material, no two museum exhibitions are identical, the display approaches adopted in each case are very different. In contemporary museum practice exhibition designs come in many varieties and styles. The design approach taken when presenting a collection to the public is therefore entirely individual for each institution. Nevertheless, some commonalities between each of the displays do exist. Something each of the four East Asian displays explored in this study share, is that they are permanent. Permanent displays require a distinct design approach, they must connect to the overall story which the museum wishes to tell. This could be the reasoning behind why the interpretation of these collections largely draws out their connections to Ireland and Irish collectors, as they exist in Irish institutions. The design approach selected for permanent exhibitions evidently must be in ‘sympathy’ with the objects exhibited and the environment in which the exhibit is placed, as they will endure for a long period of time. Many styles of permanent displays exist. The four East Asian displays in Ireland can be summarised as ‘collection displays’, since they each present work from the permanent collections of the museums (George 2015: 36).

Another easily recognisable similarity between the displays is that they each contain East Asian art objects (alongside cultural artefacts as Chapter Five will further discuss). Traditionally art objects have been displayed in emotive exhibition designs. These designs are largely aesthetic and produced with the intention of having an

effect on the viewers emotions (Belcher 1991: 58). Emotive exhibitions contain a minimum of interference, graphics and interpretative aids, and are presented in a way in which their visual qualities can be best appreciated (Belcher 1991: 60). As has previously been discussed, in both the Ulster Museum and the Hunt Museum, the collections are each presented with a minimal amount of information about the collections and the objects in the collections. The collections are in well-lit cases, with the space for them to be appreciated for their aesthetic qualities. In this sense, the Ulster Museum and Hunt displays are object oriented; they are reliant upon the objects themselves and it is the objects alone that form the basis of the concepts behind the exhibitions. In object orientated exhibitions the collections remain central and interpretative information is limited (Dean 1996: 4). This type of display may be the result of a 'scarcity of ideas' surrounding the collections (Burcaw 1997: 134), which is perhaps the case for the O'Neill collection and the Hunt collection because both remain largely un-researched, so very little information is known about them. Both the O'Neill and the Hunt collections are presented in a single display case, accordingly, a popular method of approaching emotive displays is to group objects together. Grouped displays like these ones are found in museums all over the world as they are 'easy to do', although generally they are the least 'useful' or 'interesting' type of display, except to specialists (Ambrose and Paine 2012: 86).

The O'Neill collection does not solely utilise emotive methods and in addition incorporates the traits of open access display. This type of display allows visitors to explore connections for themselves (Lord 2014: 19). The educational approach to interpretation taken situates the O'Neill collection between displays of delftware and studio pottery, therefore enabling visitors to make visual connections between each of these styles. Moreover, many objects which have been excluded from the main Hunt Museum display are placed in a drawer display that visitors can open (see Figure 3.2 below). This arrangement largely resembles an open storage display, something which is becoming an increasingly prevalent trend in current museum practice. With many institutions choosing to utilise this display style as a method of presenting a greater percentage of collections to their audience. In Ireland, most notable is the National Museum of Ireland's *Out of Storage* exhibition (National Museum of Ireland 2020), which opened to the public in 2015 (see figure 3.3 below). In this approach to display labelling is usually absent or minimal.

Figure 3.2 Drawer display, Hunt Museum, Limerick (2017). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Figure 3.3 Out of Storage exhibition which utilises drawers as a display strategy, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin (2019). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

The Albert Bender collection and the Chester Beatty collections instead reflect the characteristics of didactic displays. The intention of a didactic exhibition design is to impart information, instruct and educate. Interpretative media is heavily employed and objects are not allowed to 'speak for themselves' (Belcher 1991: 62). A didactic display tries to tell a story, the role of objects and collections is to help to tell this story (Ambrose and Paine 2012: 86). Concentrating on the educational mission of a museum in this way is an idea driven approach, curators decide which stories and ideas should be presented. Text and photographs play a dominant role in focussing the message of the exhibition and in transferring information. It can be argued that this type of display overlooks the fact that a large number of museum visitors do not enter museums to be 'coerced into learning' (Belcher 1991: 63). Moreover, this display approach presents philosophical challenges, surrounding whether museums should be obliged to communicate information in this way, or if displaying objects

alone is enough (Burcaw 1997: 134). Nevertheless, this mode of display has benefits, including that it can help visitors to understand the meaning and importance of objects in a clear way. Also, it can reveal stories which would otherwise be hidden, and in doing so make connections with the museum visitor (Molineux 2014: 126).

The exhibition of the Albert Bender collection also utilises other design elements, thus is not solely didactic. The Bender collection contains interactive elements in the form of a touch screen where further information surrounding the objects can be found, and a flip book which details Bender's connections to prominent Irish writers and artists. Interactive design elements can be defined as aspects of an exhibition which involve the visitor in a 'series of related activities, that involve intellectual as well as physical action' (Belcher 1991: 65). These elements build layers of information surrounding the collection, add further depth to the interpretation given, allow for visitor participation and suit the needs of most learners. Furthermore, in displaying the Bender collection the National Museum of Ireland employs 'rotating' design elements. The inclusion of exhibit elements which change regularly is becoming a popular method of updating permanent displays (Maximea 2014: 99). This aspect of display will be further explored in Chapter Four.

Design Elements that Shape the Visitor Experience: Light, Colour and Text

This section discusses three elements that shape the visitor experience in the four case study museum collections: light, colour and text. By drawing further upon curator interviews that focussed on the museum's intention, as well as best practice in these areas, I consider the impact of the curator and museum setting on the collections. Accordingly, the areas of lighting, colour, text, and the spatial arrangement of objects were recurring themes throughout each of the interviews conducted, and will thus be the focus of this section.

Lighting and Forging a Visitor Experience

When designing a museum exhibition there are many other important elements to consider: such as light, space, colour, ambiance, and text. In the interviews held with museum curators, they each referred to these factors revealing them as important elements in their curatorial practices. Each of these elements completely changes an

exhibition, altering the portrayal of objects and collections and transforming how visitors interact with what is on display. An exhibition is essentially a visual experience, and light is essential to the success of any museum exhibit design. The understanding of light in exhibitions involves an awareness of perception, behavioural psychology and aesthetics (Belcher 1991: 125). Light can affect the visitor both psychologically and physiologically, it can alter the object's apparent size, affect the exhibition's ambiance and modify the colours of a display (Bogle 2013: 233). Moreover, lighting can evoke various emotional responses by the museum visitor. A dimly lit space which highlights objects can stimulate curiosity, small objects displayed in intimate spaces can stimulate the feelings of importance. Conversely the same object in a large space may appear insignificant (Dean 1996: 46).

Lighting will vary for each exhibition as some objects require the even distribution of light and others benefit from a more dramatic approach, achieved by a variation in light levels. A dramatic approach can be observed in the display of religious objects in the Chester Beatty Library, particularly in the display of a nineteenth-century bronze *Temple Guardian* (see Figure 3.4 below). The lighting of this object allows it to have a striking and powerful effect as a result of harsh shadows. Displaying objects in this way is a standard practice of modern exhibitions and can be referred to as 'case in point' (Barker 1999: 14). Objects are placed under spotlights in otherwise dimly lit spaces, endowing them 'with an air of mystery and preciousness' (Barker 1999: 14). This type of lighting is typically used with ancient and often with what was termed 'primitive art' in cultural discourses, as is the case for the Chester Beatty Library.

Figure 3.4 Bronze *Temple Guardian* (nineteenth-century), Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (2017). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

During the design phase of the Bender exhibition, NMI curator Audrey Whitty stated that the museum ‘put a lot of money’ and ‘invested very strategically and deliberately in the area of lighting’ (interview with Whitty 2018). The museum employed a lighting designer because lighting was a significant factor in relation to the conservation of the objects. Whitty wanted to ensure that the fragile objects on display, could

‘maintain full display without any decreasing of the condition of these objects’ (interview with Whitty 2018). Conservation is a recurrent theme across many of the interviews conducted, and will be explored further in Chapter Four. Lighting in the Beatty collection is primarily used to aid the preservation of objects. Although the museum has aimed to make the displays ‘look attractive’, lighting does not play a role in the aesthetic presentation of objects and is ‘kept dim for preservation’ (interview with Baldwin 2019). In particular the religious statues in this collection are dimly lit. Often low lighting techniques are implemented in the display of religious objects so as to mimic a temple or sacred space (Chapter Four explores this in more depth). Although, in this case it would appear that any such effects of the lighting have been purely incidental, with the conservation of objects being the only influence in this area.

Space is also a significant attribute of exhibition design, affecting how objects are perceived by museum visitors. According to exhibition design theory (Bogle 2013), items which are meant to relate to one another should be grouped together. Items which are to be viewed as separate entities, should be displayed with enough space around them so that they can be seen alone. If a large space surrounds an object, the object will convey ‘a sense of elegance, power, importance, create attention and attract the visitor’ and on the other hand a small area will convey the opposite (Bogle 2013: 257). Within the Albert Bender collection objects can be seen both grouped together and displayed alone, which creates two entirely different effects (see Figures 3.5 and 3.6 below).

Figure 3.5 Objects grouped together, snuff bottles (Qing dynasty), National Museum of Ireland, Dublin (2017). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Figure 3.6 Object displayed alone, Bodhisattva head (Ming dynasty), National Museum of Ireland, Dublin (2017). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

For the Ulster Museum's O'Neill collection, the positioning and grouping of objects in the display case was principally a decision of aesthetics. A few of the objects in the case have been grouped together, including the three celadon pieces, the yellow Ming dynasty pieces and the blue Qing dynasty pieces. These decisions were made as the objects visually complimented each other in groups. The placement of the

blue and white porcelain pieces however is ‘to do with their importance’ (interview with Mawhinney 2019). These objects are presented at the very top of the display case, the reason being that this offers a visual representation of the fact that they are the most valuable objects in the case. Also, because visitors who are ‘knowledgeable about Chinese ceramics would automatically recognise those as being the most valuable and the most important’ (interview with Mawhinney 2019). The blue and white porcelain pieces are therefore the ‘spotlight’ or the ‘centre point’ of the overall O’Neill display. The physical lighting in the gallery also accentuates the blue and white pieces, adding further emphasis to their prominent place in the display.

Text in Museum Displays

Text is the heart of the educational content of exhibitions. It bestows collections and objects with a voice allowing them to speak of their own importance and to tell their story, something which they would otherwise not achieve. However, museum studies literature repeatedly argues that text is often thought to be the most ‘poorly thought out’ aspect of exhibitions (Dean 1996: 109; Ravelli 2006). Museum text panels and labels have their origins in nineteenth-century display styles, which utilised the handwritten identification slips of curators (Belcher 1991: 156). In contemporary museum practice, exhibition panels are typically used to provide a title to the exhibit, necessary information about the exhibit and captions for objects where needed (Burcaw 1997: 130). Exhibition text occurs on many levels, on the first level there are titles and headlines, following that are overviews and introductions, on the third level lies general content, with labels and captions at the final level (Tang and Mayrand 2014: 317). In contemporary exhibition designs it is also necessary for harmony to exist between objects and the labels which represent them.

The existing text panels and labels in the four East Asian museum collections explored in this thesis are generally in keeping with modern display standards. In some cases, however, issues could be taken with the amount of information given; there are examples in some of the museums of too little text and in others far too complex narratives. By providing minimal textual information visitors could be left with questions regarding the objects, conversely large amounts of text can easily overwhelm visitors. The Hunt Museum collection presents the least information, only

containing poorly written labels. These labels state the names of the objects, but it has been noted by the staff at this museum that many of these labels are incorrect. The O'Neill collection presents slightly more information. This includes one text panel alongside labels disclosing the names of the objects, with very little told about the use of the objects and their origin. The text panel displayed alongside this collection demonstrates each of the elements of best practice (see Figure 3.7 below). The title is set apart from the main body of text in large clear lettering and does not contain more than ten words. Similarly, the main body of text is concise and legible, it is split up into easily digested paragraphs which are shorter than seventy-five words in length and overall the text is shorter than two hundred words (exhibition text best practice specified by Dean 1996: 109-119).

Figure 3.7 The *O'Neill Collection of Chinese Ceramics* text panel, Ulster Museum, Belfast (2017). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

The Beatty and Bender displays contain the most text out of the four examples explored in this study. With such vast amounts of labels, text panels and captions presented throughout the displays, that a calculation of the total number of words or textual narratives included would be very difficult to attain, something which would be beyond the time limitations of this study to accomplish. Regardless, this highlights the significance placed on text as an interpretative aid in these two displays.

In her interview Audrey Whitty, curator of the Albert Bender collection, placed a lot of emphasis on the use of the text in this exhibit, including the challenges surrounding the craft of writing exhibition text. Whitty disclosed that the ultimate decisions surrounding the text in the Bender exhibition were in the end made by herself (interview with Whitty 2018). These textual aids were constrained by 'word count per-panel' and the overall 'amount of reading' a visitor was expected to accomplish during their visit (interview with Whitty 2018). But at the same time allowing the exhibition 'context' and allowing visitors to be 'culturally aware' of certain objects through the text included was also seen to be important. An example being the Tibetan Buddhist thangkas that originated from Gansu Province which is technically Chinese territory. The text for these objects thus very deliberately states 'Tibetan Buddhist China' (interview with Whitty 2018).

The inclusion of both English and Irish language in each of the NMI panels and labels was likewise a significant challenge for Whitty when constructing the Bender exhibition. She described that Canadian institutions were consciously used for inspiration and guidance in this area because 'of the bilingualism and their ability to combine the two languages, the primacy, and how successfully they had done that in the past' (interview with Whitty 2018). Consequently, when two languages must be combined in text panels and labels, 'language becomes a big deal for the curator' (interview with Whitty 2018). Considerations here include an equal distribution of text in both the languages included on panels and labels, in conjunction with an overall shorter space for text to be included. This is undoubtedly a challenge for all state funded museums in officially bilingual or multilingual regions. Nevertheless, it remains a significant tool which affects the overall reception and perception of the finished exhibition.

The curators responsible for the Chester Beatty collection also placed a great emphasis on the text in the exhibition during the interview process. Baldwin discusses the restraints faced when introducing text into the exhibition. Similar to the Bender exhibition, some of the text panels and labels have been translated into Irish. However, in this case only the central panels include dual languages. These panels are seen to be particularly significant as they present 'the overall theme' (interview with Baldwin 2019). The labels are allowed 'a bit more flexibility', although they are still in some ways restrained by word count (interview with Baldwin 2019). Consequently, it becomes evident that effective labels go hand-in-hand with clearly conceived ideas about how exhibits are organised and presented (Monti and Keene 2013: 39). In the Chester Beatty Library labels primarily denote what Baldwin referred to as 'tomb stone information', including dates, locations and the collection number (interview with Baldwin 2019). They are intended to 'interact with whatever's around it' (interview with Baldwin 2019), rather than relate to only one specific object. Textual aids are thus an integral part of the overall exhibition design, and need to make sense in the organisation of the overall display. They also must be legible and straightforward information for the viewer to comprehend. In regard to their intended audience, the Chester Beatty Library very openly state that textual aids (labels and panels) have been 'written for the interested adult' (interview with Baldwin 2019).

Colour and its Impact on Display

The final element of exhibition design that will be discussed is colour. Colour in exhibitions is not simply concerned with superficial visual effect. The colour of an exhibition affects its ambiance and atmosphere; the total experience of what we see and how we feel. But other aspects also need to be taken into consideration, including psychology, symbolism, cultural characterisations and the theories surrounding the science of colour (Belcher 1991: 129). Museum visitors respond to colour both emotionally and physically. Warm colours stimulate the visitor and should be used in areas of 'heightened activity', conversely cool colours slow down a visitor's perception of time, bestowing a calming and relaxing effect (Bogle 2013: 190).

In recent years white has dominated as an exhibition background shade, the main reason for this is because it is thought that white does not interfere with the colour

values of objects (Belcher 1991: 129). Nevertheless, many other colours are frequently used in museum exhibitions. Red is utilised in the display of the Albert Bender collection. Red is a ‘strong, emotional and compelling’ colour (Bogle 2013: 191). Within museum exhibitions it is best used in areas that are conductive to social interaction and is thus perfect for active participatory areas (Bogle 2013: 191). This is how the colour red is used by the National Museum of Ireland in the display of the Bender collection; alongside an interactive booklet, stamp press and electronic tablet (see Figure 3.8 below). However, when placed against a white background red will appear to be more prominent, this effect is especially helpful when there is a need for an object to stand out (Bogle 2013: 197), an effect which can be seen in the display of the O’Neill collection by the Ulster Museum, as red accents have been utilised to allow items of blue and white Ming porcelain to stand out (see Figure 3.9 below). As mentioned, these items are the most valuable in the collection and are perhaps the most commonly recognised style of East Asian ceramics, thus feasibly justifying why they should be emphasised in this display.

Figure 3.8 Interpretative area of the Albert Bender exhibition, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin (2017). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Figure 3.9 Display of the O'Neill collection, Ulster Museum, Belfast (2017). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Colour creates its own space and environment, it can draw attention and create an atmosphere in a display space. More than any other physical characteristic of a display, colour can be argued to 'send specific messages to people about objects on display and to influence their emotive response to them' (Monti and Keene 2013: 39). Moreover, certain colours including red, are connected to different cultural connotations. In regard to the Bender exhibition the graphic design, including the

colour selections of this exhibition were all done in house by a member of museum staff. In this case, ‘the blood [red] was chosen because it was more of a reference to China’ (interview with Whitty 2018). Conversely the green/blue colour also used, was selected in reference to other exhibits typically seen as best practice; Whitty revealed that ‘the turquoise green/blue is used widely as it is usually inspired by celadon glaze’ (interview with Whitty 2018).

Colour has a special significance in the design of the Beatty exhibit, as it is through colour that a division between different categories of objects is primarily formed. The colours in each exhibition were ‘deliberately chosen’ (interview with Baldwin 2019). Within the display spaces colour has the purpose of placing the objects into themed sections or categories, and giving ‘a sense of the different collections’ in the wider Beatty collection (interview with Baldwin 2019). The colours utilised are intentionally ‘very deep and rich’ as they have been drawn from the palette of the objects (interview with Baldwin 2019). Different colours were chosen for each section of the museum, both to aid in dividing the sections into themes and also because it was not possible to choose one colour which would work for everything across the collections (interview with Redfern 2019). Red has been utilised as a background colour in the display of Asian sacred objects. In contrast to this, Christian objects have been displayed in a purple section of the gallery and Islamic objects have been codified in a green section. Museum wide deep blue has been utilised as a ‘building colour’ (interview with Baldwin 2019). This shade of blue has been used to colour the metalwork of the museum’s staircases, and alongside vibrant green, is the colour utilised in the museum’s branding. The cases in the displays have been painted grey, this ‘was chosen just to disappear, so you shouldn’t really be too aware, the last thing we want people to do is to just only focus on the colour’ (interview with Baldwin 2019).

In the O’Neill display, colour is used as a distinctive tactic for drawing the attention of the museum visitor. A ‘highlight colour’ has therefore been employed in the O’Neill display, this colour was very deliberately chosen to be a ‘Chinese red’ (interview with Mawhinney 2019), and it is set alongside the beige grey of the other plinths in the case. In particular the red colour of the central plinths in the display are used to ‘show off the blue and white porcelain’ (interview with Mawhinney 2019), therefore

consideration has been given to colour theory and the benefits of using complimentary colours. The selection of the colour red was thus consciously chosen because of both its connection to China and also because it complements the objects displayed. Interestingly, it would seem that the colour red is commonly utilised as a symbol or indication of China in museum displays; selected by the Chester Beatty Library and the National Museum of Ireland for this reason also.

Visitor Responses to the Displays

Chapter Three has so far focussed its attention on developing an understanding of the display strategies implemented for each collection. An unexplored area has thus been how museum visitors perceive and interact with the display approaches enforced. Overall fifty-two visitor interviews were completed.

Visitor Responses at the National Museum of Ireland

Eleven interviews were conducted with visitors to the Albert Bender exhibition over the course of one full day (a busy Sunday at the museum). It is significant to note that during the period when these interviews took place, a large number of museum visitors passed through the Bender galleries (over one-hundred individuals non-inclusive of children). Therefore, only a small proportion of these visitors actually stopped to view and discuss the collection. The visitors who did agree to an interview were asked five questions: (1) Have you enjoyed visiting this exhibition? (2) What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition? (3) What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling? (4) Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition? (5) Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most? These questions stayed consistent across the four exhibitions investigated in this study. The only exception was the Chester Beatty Library, in this case the museum requested that visitors should be asked additional questions regarding their experiences and profiles, as will later be discussed. Additionally, the word ‘exhibition’ was replaced with ‘display’ when conducting visitor interviews for the two smaller collections (O’Neill and Hunt).

Every museum visitor who took part in the interview process stated that they enjoyed visiting the Bender exhibition. However, the similarities in the answers given by

visitors stops here. A number of objects were mentioned when visitors were asked question two (which object they found most memorable): including the Daoist priest robe, the snuff bottles the silk paintings and the thangkas just to name a few. This reflects the design approach taken in this exhibition, as the display methods utilised were intended by the curator to allow visitors the ability to select the objects and stories which interest them the most. The diverse selection of objects chosen by museum visitors suggests that individuals visiting the Bender exhibition are in fact allowed the freedom to view the objects displayed through the lens of their own personal preferences and interests.

However, in regard to narrative and interpretation the data collected suggests that the collector of these objects (Albert Bender) still retains a prominent impression on the museum visitor. The most common responses to the following two questions (what story do you feel that this exhibit is telling and who do you feel is represented) included Bender, Japan and China. Given the number of responses to each of these questions (twelve out of twenty-two) that state Bender, it becomes apparent that the master narrative of this exhibition, surrounding the life of Albert Bender, is something which the majority of museum visitors comprehend during their visit. Therefore, although the display approach taken enables visitors to use their own personal interests in selecting individual objects to view, the exhibition as a whole remains dominantly associated to the collector Albert Bender. The majority response to the final question asked (who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition) was that the exhibit was suitable for anyone. Nevertheless, some visitors responded by saying only those with a specialist interest or knowledge would enjoy it, and one visitor stated that the exhibit would be most suitable for an older generation. The museum has thus on the most part been successful in enabling this exhibition to appeal to a wide audience, by including many layers of information in it, appealing to a variety of ages and interest points.

These responses are in many ways similar to the visitor responses obtained at the Chester Beatty Library. One visitor who took part in the interviews even compared the Bender exhibit to the Chester Beatty Library in regard to the story it was telling. The Chester Beatty Library exhibition thus has many parallels to the Bender exhibition through its design, narrative, the objects included and the location of each

museum in Dublin city centre. Yet, the Chester Beatty Library does have one distinct difference. The approach taken by this museum places a much greater emphasis on the objects themselves rather than their collector Alfred Chester Beatty, as will next be explored.

Visitor Responses at the Chester Beatty Library

Visitor interviews were carried out with individuals who came to observe the Chester Beatty collection during a busy period at the museum: the Saturday following St Patricks Day when many tourists and visitors remained in Dublin. However, not long into the interviews it became apparent that with the large majority of visitors belonging to tour groups who did not have the time or ability to stop and contribute, not many individuals would agree to participate in the interviews. As a consequence, seventeen interviews were completed. Nevertheless, the Chester Beatty Library was unquestionably the busiest of the four sites investigated in this study. The popularity of the site as a visitor and tourist attraction was previously mentioned by Jessica Baldwin during interview, with an estimated 'one thousand visitors through the front door and about six hundred to the first floor' during an average weekend (interview with Baldwin 2019).

During this visitor interview session, the questions altered slightly from the other case studies, as the Chester Beatty Library requested additional questions to be added. This granted the museum the ability to also benefit from the interview research conducted. The additional questions focussed on gathering a general demographic of the types of visitors entering the museum, alongside information surrounding the overall experience of their visit. The additional questions included: Where did you hear about the Chester Beatty? Would you recommend our exhibitions to your friends? How would you rate your overall experience at the Chester Beatty today? Are you male or female? And, which of the following age bands matches your age (under 16, 16-19, 20-32, 33-45, 46-64, 65+)? However, the responses to these additional questions were solely for the benefit of the museum, and will not be examined in this study. If this additional data was utilised the analysis would become unequal and disproportionate across the four case studies, with additional information gathered in this case, thus it would seem to mitigate for biases. Adding questions to this case study is most likely the reason why it was more

difficult in this case to engage with visitors. The longer list of questions persuaded the majority of visitors who did stop to participate to say no to answering them. However, this factor was unavoidable, adding further questions enabled the museum to agree to allowing this PhD research project to be conducted.

Overall it is not conclusive if the object centred display approach implemented by the museum affected the results gathered. When asked about the storyline of the exhibit and who it represented, the responses were extremely varied. The exhibition narratives which visitors perceived ranged from East Asia, to different countries, to Chester Beatty, with one visitor stating that they picked up on the small narratives told about each object. Therefore, regardless of the museum's object centred approach to display, Beatty still featured heavily in the responses given. However, an interesting response was given in two cases, when the individuals stated that not enough information surrounding Chester Beatty was given in the exhibit. Therefore, it would appear that in some cases visitors did pick up on the object focussed meta-narrative presented by the museum, even feeling that Beatty needed more attention. Although, as these results were extremely divided in the visitor's recognition of Beatty (the collector) as the prominent storyline of this exhibit, the object centred approach to display taken did not impact all visitors. Only approximately half of all visitors interviewed perceived the cultural origins of the objects in the exhibition as a prominent storyline. The remaining half still perceived the objects displayed through the context of their collector (Chester Beatty). Therefore, the museum's object focussed display approach impacted only (approximately) half of the interviewees who viewed the collection on this day.

The objects selected as visitor favourites in the Chester Beatty collection is however a direct reflection of the museum's object centred approach, with a wide diversity of objects selected. The objects chosen by visitors included the dragon robe, Japanese scrolls, snuff bottles, jade pieces and woodblock prints. Consequently, a real variety of objects were chosen by visitors. This supports the display approach taken by the museum, in which visitors are free to select objects and pieces of information which most appeals to their personal taste. However, Beatty returned as the majority response for the next question asked (who visitors felt was represented by the exhibit). Only six out of the seventeen responses claimed this to be East Asia or the

countries which the objects originated from. Four of these responses stated that both Beatty and the cultures/countries were represented. Therefore, eight responses in total felt instead that it was Chester Beatty (the collector) who was represented in this exhibition. Suggesting that although many visitors did discern and respond to the object centred approach and cultural narratives in the exhibit, the name of the museum and its entrance hall dedicated to Chester Beatty still ensures that the majority of visitors perceive him through the collection displayed. Taking the answers to the visitor interviews conducted as a whole, therefore suggests that the object centred display approach of this museum has only been successful to a certain extent. Many visitors disregard the museum's efforts to focus on the objects and their cultural contexts. Although some visitors did pick up on the prominence given to the objects and their place of cultural origin in the exhibition, how this exhibition is understood is therefore purely a reflection of personal interest and perception.

In regard to whom visitors felt the exhibit is most suited for, it would appear that the museum does in fact cater for the 'interested adult' (interview with Baldwin 2019). A significant proportion of the individuals interviewed believed that the exhibition would only be suitable for adults and was not for children. One visitor even stated that the glass cases/objects were presented too high up to be suitable for children. A few responses also stated that the exhibit was not only suited to adults but distinctively those with a specialist interest.

Visitor Responses at the Ulster Museum

Eleven interviews were conducted with individuals who came to visit the Ulster Museum and observed the O'Neill collection. This collection is placed in an open space in-between a main exhibition gallery and a children's art and craft room/workshop space, therefore the majority of individuals who stop and view this collection are generally flowing from one place to another. Unlike the other collections previously discussed, the O'Neill collection therefore for the most part does not retain an audience which visits this collection specifically. Acquiring visitor numbers for this collection consequently depends on the movement of individuals throughout the museum space, and between the other attractions and amenities which the museum has to offer. On the day which visitor interviews at the Ulster Museum were conducted the museum was busy and experiencing high visitor

numbers; approximately 338 individuals (not including children) passed by the O'Neill collection. However, as this collection can perhaps be viewed as something which is supplementary and not a destination in itself, the majority of individuals who walked by the collection did not stop to view it. Therefore, out of the large number of visitors who entered the museum on this occasion only thirteen stopped to view the collection, and eleven of these individuals agreed to an interview.

Something which initially became evident from the interviews, is that regardless of the fact that information about O'Neill is included at the bottom of the text panel (where the Ulster Museum assumes the least visitors will read) he still featured heavily in visitor responses. This is perhaps because of the unmistakable connection to O'Neill made in the title of the display. When asked who/what they felt was represented by the exhibit over half the responses stated O'Neill. One visitor also stated that 'Europe' and not China was represented because of the exhibits portrayal of O'Neill (interview with Ulster Museum Visitor 6, 2019). Correspondingly, another visitor agreed that the objects were put into an 'unusual context' and it was the context of 'Europe' or 'the Western collector' not China (interview with Ulster Museum Visitor 10, 2019). A further opinion concurred that the display was more about O'Neill than the objects on view, and a further visitor believed that the display was not associated enough with China. Consequently, by tying the collection to its collector the cultural origins of the objects are in some ways overshadowed. The connection to O'Neill is apparent at first glance of the collection and minimal information has been given about the actual objects. Therefore, the objects can perhaps be seen to play a secondary role; as evidence in a narrative of O'Neill's legacy. In this case it is O'Neill's identity which has become encompassed in this collection, although the narrative of O'Neill is not the only history which these objects depict it is undoubtedly the prominent one.

The story or aspect of history which the majority of museum visitors felt was depicted by this display consequently was also the story of O'Neill. However, in this segment of the interviews it also became apparent that museum visitors are extremely influenced by their own tastes and knowledge and therefore perceived the collection through the lens of their own background and experiences. A group of tourists paying a visit to the museum from Holland viewed connections between the blue and

white Chinese porcelain pieces on display and delftware from Holland as the prominent narrative told through this display. This connection is not prompted by the display itself, and thus has been influenced entirely by personal experience. Contrary to this, a museum visitor who did not appear to allow their own opinions and values influence their interpretation of the collection and who spent a great deal of time reading the text included in the display before responding, came to an entirely different conclusion. This visitor stated that they did not previously know that 'China had manufactured porcelain eight thousand years before the West' (interview with Ulster Museum Visitor 5, 2019), and so had learnt about the history of Chinese porcelain through the display's narrative. For this visitor, the most prominent story in the display was therefore the history of Chinese porcelain.

Personal taste likewise also seemed to motivate which objects visitors selected as their favourite from the display. With minimal contextual information and an aesthetic approach taken to presenting the objects, individuals were left to select which objects they regarded as most visually compelling. A wide variety of objects were therefore selected by visitors, purely on account of personal taste. Examples of why individuals selected favourite objects from the display include; because they liked the yellow colour, or because the shape and colour of a dish reminded them of something from home. Other visitors chose objects because they had never previously seen anything like the object selected, because they felt drawn to it, because the object reminds them of an English pottery style they admire and because of the object parallels contemporary designs they appreciate. Observation likewise shows that while some objects are the focus of interest for many viewers, others are almost completely ignored. The aesthetic display approach implemented by the Ulster Museum appears to allow visitors freedom in attaching their own ideas and values to the objects. As not much background information has been given, visitors are freely enabled to come to their own conclusions. The same display was therefore experienced differently by visitors which may also have been impacted by different backgrounds and different educational frames. Therefore, in this case it seems that the interpretation applied has allowed visitors to form their own opinions.

A final point worth noting from the interview session, is the audience visitors considered to be best suited for this display. As previously mentioned the Ulster

Museum has tailored this display most prominently for use by students, although it is also thought that the display is likewise accessible to repeat visitors, general visitors and tourists. It seems that this approximation given by the museum corresponds with visitor opinions. The visitors who were interviewed seemed divided between five recurring opinions regarding audience: art students or people who enjoy art, the older generation, someone with a specialist interest, tourists and fellow visitors. Therefore, the Ulster Museum was accurate in supposing that this display would be most suitable for students, but may also appeal to a wide variety of other audience groups. Although what the museum did not account for is that fact that a large proportion of the overall individuals interviewed believed this display was actually best suited to the older generation. Interestingly, this is a response which has occurred throughout all of the interviews conducted so far. Perhaps the previous generation of collectors represented in the three museum collections discussed so far, not only represent the objects they each accumulated but also a fading trend for East Asian ceramic/artefact collecting and the dwindling taste for East Asian objects in Western domestic settings. In conclusion, the display approach implemented by the Ulster Museum (strategic placing of the O'Neill collection between Irish delftware and studio pottery collections) was not observed by any of the visitors interviewed on this day. Museum visitors would perhaps need additional information available in order to make these connections. At present, these objects are largely perceived through the context of their collector.

Visitor Responses at the Hunt Museum

The visitor interviews conducted in the Hunt Museum were not completed by myself, the researcher. Instead they were carried out by museum docents, during the tours which they led throughout the timespan of one week. This is the only case throughout the whole research project, were someone other than myself conducted the interviews. This decision was made as the day the interviews were set to occur, the Captain's Room where the museum's East Asian ceramic collection is currently displayed, had been double booked. This room in the Hunt Museum is where the majority of educational workshops and events are held, and since the museum holds educational initiatives almost daily (predominantly with primary school groups), it is challenging to gain access to this room for a long period of time. Consequently, with high demand for this space in the museum it was decided that the visitor interviews

would be more successful if not all completed during one session, but instead partially completed each day during the tours over the period of one week. This is where the docents stepped in to help. Of course, this presented challenges, as when conducting the interviews many of the docents felt confusion regarding what the questions and the research project was investigating. Likewise, there was some confusion among the museum's volunteers surrounding what objects or part of the collection the interviews were examining. Nevertheless, the interviews conducted were generally productive. Many of the responses gathered are very useful and allow insight into how museum visitors perceive the collection. In total thirteen interviews were completed at this site.

The most remarkable information gathered from the visitor interview sessions, was the diversity of narratives and objects which captured the attention of the museum audience. It appears that the individually tailored guided tours and the minimal interpretative elements in the exhibit, enables visitors to consider objects and information catered to their own personal tastes and preferences. The narratives captured by individuals therefore differs in each case, making the overall visitor experience of the museum entirely personal. The diversity of objects selected by museum visitors as their favourite in the collection, undoubtedly correlates with the objects highlighted by docents in each individual tour. By utilising tours which are different each time as the primary method of communicating information in the museum, each experience will accordingly be different. Likewise, each group of individuals will leave with different understandings, thoughts and viewpoints surrounding the museum and the objects displayed.

Unlike each of the other collections previously explored, no one object arose as the most cited in the Hunt Museum interviews. This confirms the effects of a display with minimal interpretative material. As the information presented to the museum audience is entirely catered to personal interest, each individual thus found a different aspect of the collection attention-grabbing. The objects selected by visitors as their favourite in the collection contrasted from a delftware plate, to a sweetmeat dish, to tea bowls and many included others. Equally something particular to this museum is the variety of narratives which visitors acknowledged in the collection. The story each individual took home from their visit was thus different in each case.

Those mentioned include the historical period in which the collection was assembled, the story of the Hunt family and Dublin craft makers. Also, the story of wealth, what was once fashionable, the story of how crockery became known as china, the domestic use of ceramics, a Japanese tea ceremony and the history of blue and white ceramics, just to name a few. Therefore, no consistency exists in the narratives or story lines picked up on by visitors. The narratives recalled by visitors were extremely diverse, with something entirely different discussed by each visitor, this is the only case investigated where such a diversity occurred. It is undoubtedly quite surprising that out of the thirteen visitors interviewed, each individual read and understood the collection in a different way. Similarly, when asked who they felt was represented in the display a variety of responses were also given. In this case these include the Hunt family, a broad mixture across cultures and Chinese culture. Although these responses were in many ways more consistent than before, with the large majority of visitors stating that they felt a culture if not Chinese culture was represented. This reflects the object centred approach of the tours, as although the text panels in the museum largely represent the Hunt family, the tour guides instead discuss selected objects and their histories which is indicated in the responses given.

Individual values and subjective aesthetic taste have influenced visitors in selecting which objects and contexts they perceive. The individually tailored approach to interpretation implemented by the Hunt Museum has allowed a wide variety of interests to be catered for. For this reason, when asked who they felt would enjoy this exhibit the most, all of the visitors interviewed stated in their own words that there was either something for everyone at the museum, or that the display was suited to all ages. As previously discussed when designing the displays, the Hunt Museum was to some extent aiming for a space of curiosities. The visitor interviews have reinforced this display tactic. This demonstrates that the objects and narratives presented in the display are undoubtedly considered in an arbitrary manor, which correlates with individual curiosity. The approach taken by the Hunt Museum, is entirely different to the other museum collections discussed, although the data collected has indicated that it is perhaps the most successful display in sparking curiosity and appealing to a diversity of visitors.

Chapter Three Conclusion

Although the four East Asian collections examined in this PhD project share many similarities, the display and interpretation approaches utilised by each museum are in fact very different. The Chester Beatty library has taken a largely didactic approach to display which centres on the objects themselves. The National Museum of Ireland has instead chosen to focus its attention on the stories and lives of the individuals who came into contact with the collection: Albert Bender and Adolf Mahr. The Hunt Museum has taken a family approach to display which is largely dependent on the legacy which the Hunt family left behind, and also the family approach of the museum's docent group which largely runs the tours and educational programmes surrounding the collection today. Finally, the approach of the Ulster Museum can be summarised as both aesthetic and didactic, as it draws out the aesthetically pleasing aspects of each of the ceramic objects it displays and visually aims to educate visitors through visual connections between objects. Regardless, there exists crossover in the factors considered by curators when displaying the collections, particularly the consideration of light, colour, text, spatial arrangement and narrative.

Equally it has become apparent that all museums face many pressures when constructing displays. Today there is more need than ever to suit a variety of visitor needs and to allow a diversity of communities and individuals to feel welcome in the museum space. As this chapter has discovered, to accommodate these changes it is becoming common practice for designers and exhibitors to create layers of information (multiple voices), which will suit different interest groups (Hughes 2010: 36). Museum visitors therefore must no longer be seen as a single homogenous group, and instead as many publics and individuals who will each interpret objects differently (Burcaw 1997: 133). This can be observed in each of the case studies explored. Even in the most traditional example (the Hunt Museum display) more than one method of display was utilised, presenting layers of information; open storage display alongside a traditional emotive display. One of the most contemporary exhibitions in Ireland (the Albert Bender exhibit) displays a multitude of layers of information through interactive elements.

The interviews conducted with museum visitors proved especially insightful to this investigation, as in each case they conveyed the dimensions of individual experiences and understandings of the displays. However, they also made apparent that in regard to each of the displays multiple readings were conceivable. Therefore, it is controversial when a museum presents one universal interpretation of a display, as it is more than likely that visitor understandings will not be as singular. Instead, by presenting the possibility of multiple readings of objects, a more critical approach to viewing is encouraged (Monti and Keene 2013: 46). Regardless of the display approach taken it has also become evident that in every exhibit some objects are more prevalent and given more attention by museum visitors, while others are not as visually captivating. Therefore, in all cases the way something visually appeared greatly influenced visitor behaviours towards it (Monti and Keene 2013: 5). When visitors were asked to discuss their favourite object in the collections, in each case some objects were not mentioned at all and equally other objects were mentioned repeatedly. Thus, each of the displays have conscious and unconscious effects on the museum visitor, causing visitors to select an object because of either its visual presentation or the personal impression it makes.

It is clear that the way a museum display is intended to be perceived does not always reflect how it is actually received by the visitor. This became most evident in the case of the Chester Beatty Library exhibition, as although the museum intended for the objects to be the focus of the display many museum visitors still regarded the collector Chester Beatty as the most prominent narrative presented. Other than this example however, the visitor interviews did substantiate many of the intended narratives and interpretations of the displays. Therefore, on the most part the museum visitors experienced the exhibitions as the curators intended.

Chapter Four
The Challenge of Displaying East Asian Collections in Ireland

During the interviews conducted with the curators of the four East Asian collections explored in this PhD research, two primary areas emerged as challenging when displaying and interpreting these collections. These areas are conservation and the presentation of religion in a museum environment. Chapter Four will first examine the area of conservation, dissecting its influence on the display strategies and interpretative narratives constructed through an exhibition. The internationally recognised standards for museum display, dictating lighting and other environmental conditions, have a major impact on what visitors experience when viewing a museum display. Meaning in an exhibition space is not only made by the content of the displays, the text and layout of an exhibition; additionally, conservation concerns go a long way to dictating what a curator can do in an exhibition space. In this section I explore how conservation concerns shape the narrative in two of my case study museums. A chief finding from this section is that conservation has an impact, which I didn't expect, on the interpretation and experience of the display of East Asian collections in the Chester Beatty Library and National Museum of Ireland. I argue that conservation strategies largely determine the presentation of objects in a museum space, and therefore as a direct result also impact the narratives and contexts which these objects portray to the visitor. By exploring the areas of the display case, object deterioration and the museum environment it will become apparent that the display components previously discussed in Chapter Three, such as lighting, spatial arrangement, display cases and the rotation of displayed objects, are often a result of conservation measures. Consequently, the narratives constructed become a secondary outcome of the conservation procedures put in place.

The first section of this chapter (Display Challenge One) highlights the fact that every museum display must balance preventative conservation with making the visitor experience of collections comfortable, enjoyable and informative. While preventative conservation minimises the effects of deterioration and safeguards objects for the future, some deterioration (especially while on display) is often inevitable. Meaning the needs of preventative conservation will therefore continue to be a prominent

debate and challenge in the museum sector for many years to come. As long as cultural artefacts are valued by society, protecting them will remain an important responsibility. Understanding the role conservation plays in the museum sector is thus imperative to an accurate comprehension of museum interpretation and display practices, as they are often determined by object preservation demands. Conservation demands can therefore be argued to have a direct impact on how museum objects are understood by visitors, likewise impacting how museum visitors will think about them. The lighting and display cases used in an exhibition, along with the layout of the exhibition space largely influences how visitors interact with the objects presented, and as a result how these objects are interpreted and narrated in the mind of the individual. However, as this section will unfold, the museum's reasoning for incorporating certain glass cases, lighting effects or spatial arrangements is actually for the preservation and safeguarding of objects in the collections. The influence of these factors, and also budget constraints, on interpretation then often becomes an unintentional effect.

The second section of this chapter (Display Challenge Two) explores a topic which has been the subject of much debate in recent years: the interpretation and display of religious objects in museum spaces (Paine 2013; Whitehead 2015; Buggeln**,** Paine and Plate 2017). These debates have focussed on issues of representation, interpretation and inclusion. In relation to this PhD, the display of religious objects also emerged from the interviews conducted with museum professionals as part of this study (predominantly during the interview session held at the Chester Beatty Library). The careful thought required by religious objects impacts on conservation, handling, display and interpretation. In a museum setting, the interpretation and narration of religious objects raises questions not only regarding the identities they embody, but also regarding the ways we understand the religious traditions they embody and what they represent in museums today (Sullivan 2015: 2). Furthermore, an increasing number of people in the Western world today have limited exposure to religious traditions and practices, and museums may be one of the few places where many visitors come into contact with religion (Buggeln, Paine and Plate 2017: 4). Therefore, museums today face varied pressures and challenges when placing religious objects on display, particularly when East Asian religious objects are presented in a Western museum environment. These challenges will be further

unfolded in part two, through an exploration of the display techniques used by the National Museum of Ireland and the Chester Beatty Library.

Display Challenge One: How Conservation Requirements Impact Display Narrative

When historical objects enter a museum setting they gain a new function, this is to preserve and display evidence of the past. This is generally known as the 'curation' phase of an objects life (Caple 2011: 1). The Western view of collections management recommends that an object in a collection should be prevented from corroding or decaying, as in many cases deterioration would reduce the object's ability to perform as a museum research or display item. When interviewed, three out of the five museum curators responsible for the East Asian collections considered in this PhD, placed a great deal of emphasis on conservation challenges. What emerged in these interviews was evidence of tension between conservation and display practices. In particular the curators responsible for the Chester Beatty and the Albert Bender collections spent a great deal of time discussing conservation, the topics and challenges which they highlighted will be further explored in this chapter. It is significant to note before continuing that conservation challenges did not emerge from the Ulster Museum and Hunt Museum curator interviews as these collections are entirely ceramic. Ceramic objects are much more durable, and do not require many of the conservation measures necessary for the textile and paper objects in the Beatty and Bender collections explored in this chapter.

P*reventative Conservation and East Asian Collections in Ireland*

During a personal interview, Audrey Whitty, Head of Collections and Learning at the National Museum of Ireland, disclosed that a major conservation challenge encountered by the museum is the delicacy of the thangka paintings in the Albert Bender collection. Twelve of the twenty-one thangka paintings are currently on display (see Figure 4.1 below), however those selected for display are 'rotated on a regular basis' (interview with Whitty 2018). The museum wanted 'to make sure that they could still maintain full display without any decreasing of the condition of these objects' (interview with Whitty 2018). The purpose of rotating these paintings is primarily to reduce their exposure to light. When the exhibition was originally

designed the museum gave much thought to lighting, investing ‘strategically and deliberately’ (interview with Whitty 2018). In order to preserve these objects, the designer could only use low lighting and still has to provide a good visitor experience. To improve the visitor experience of low levels of lighting in the section displaying the thangka paintings, without the space looking particularly dark, a very low level of lux is used in the entire area of the paintings. This allows the light to be ‘evenly distributed’ so the eye ‘doesn’t need to adjust’ (interview with Whitty 2018).

The Chester Beatty Library also changes the material on display, in order to reduce their exposure to harmful elements. The museum currently has two permanent galleries, where the themes and cases remain static, but the objects in them change. Much of this practice is directly linked to budget, as the museum’s Head of Collections and Conservation Jessica Baldwin explains, the Chester Beatty ‘can’t simply afford in time or energy to strip out so that’s why the majority of our exhibition budget goes on changing the gallery two or three times a year’ (interview with Baldwin 2019). Also at the Chester Beatty, rotation is a way to manage a large collection; the total number of objects in this collection is just under twenty-five thousand. Therefore, at any one time only about one percent of the collection is on display. Rotating the exhibits allows a greater proportion of the collections to be displayed. The rotation of objects is usually at random, however an object which without fail gets included each year is one the Chinese dragon robes in the collection. Eight dragon robes exist in Chester Beatty’s collection. An extensive and complex process to conserve and restore the robes was undertaken in 2016, which allows at least one garment to remain on permanent display (see Figure 4.2 below). The robes exhibited are changed each Chinese New Year which conserves the garments. This practice restricts the amount of direct light each comes into contact with, and returning visitors can view different items each time they visit despite spatial constraints in the galleries.

Figure 4.1 Display of Tibetan thangka paintings, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin (2019). Photograph by Stephanie Harper

Figure 4.2 Dragon robe displayed in the Chester Beatty Library (Qing Dynasty), Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (2019). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

The Chester Beatty Library and the National Museum of Ireland regularly rotate some of their most delicate items on display as light alone is perhaps the greatest threat to the long-term care of collections (Ambrose and Paine 2012: 237). It can cause serious damage to display objects. Damage from either natural or artificial light can never be completely eliminated, although it can be reduced by varying or rotating the objects on display in order to reduce their total lifetime exposure to light.

Changing the objects which are on display in a museum will significantly reduce the amount of time over which an object is illuminated (Ambrose and Paine 2012: 237). While objects are on display, the museum can further protect them by eliminating UV radiation and by reducing the amount of overall illumination. Lighting of not more than fifty lux is recommended (Hall 1987: 208), as this illuminates exhibitions to a level necessary for comfortable viewing by visitors and staff. Objects can also be somewhat protected from the damaging effects of light by only being illuminated during museum opening hours (Thomson 1978: 36). The Chester Beatty Library and the National Museum of Ireland have both put into practice these protection mechanisms, as each of these exhibition spaces have implemented low lighting levels, so the objects can be comfortably seen but are not brightly illuminated. Alongside this the museums have also removed the inclusion of daylight and flash photography from each of these exhibitions.

Preventative conservation can be defined as ‘any measure that reduces the potential for, or prevents, damage’ (Caple 2011: 1). The preservation of displayed museum objects has been a growing concern in the museum sector for many years. However, such procedures are generally only applied after an object has been taken into a museum collection, or has been deemed significant in some other way (Pye 2001: 10). As a general rule, preservation resources are only made available to objects which are seen to be culturally or historically valuable (Caple 2011: 2). The significance of an object thus affects the ways in which it may be used in the museum, including its conservation (Pye 2001: 20). Objects are in many cases powerful reflections of social, cultural, political, religious or personal significance. Because of this, the argument of many scholars who work in the area of museum conservation, is that artefacts are seen to be important signifiers of the past which need to remain as close to their original state as possible (Pye 2001; Caple 2011). Both collections discussed in this chapter have been collected by an individual who deemed the objects in their collections significant enough to preserve for future generations.

Preventative conservation is also about ensuring that the museum’s collections are displayed, stored and maintained in sustainable ways that do not lead to damage or deterioration, and that they are preserved as far as possible in an unchanging state

(Ambrose and Paine 2012: 233). Preventative conservation is first and foremost about meeting the museum's fundamental responsibility to care for its collections, it exists as a method of preventing the effects of change from obliterating the tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage. The deterioration of objects can be significantly slowed down by preventative conservation and the management of environmental conditions, however it cannot be stopped.

Many preventative conservation procedures are also used to prepare objects for an interpretative role in museums (Pye 2001: 10). The issues which affect conservation thus largely stem from the current use of museum objects in varied interpretations to a diverse audience (Pye 2001: 10). Conservation therefore has an essential role in the process of understanding the past, and in interpreting objects from the past in the present (Pye 2001: 23). Choosing suitable approaches to conservation involves ensuring that the treatment chosen safeguards all the information recorded within an object and does not conserve one aspect of the object while adversely affecting another, and thus distorting the object's significance. The significance of an object holds both tangible and intangible attributes. It is the tangible aspects only which relate to the object's material composition and can be safeguarded by conservation procedures. Consequently, there is always a limit to the amount of information preventative conservation can retain in an object, as intangible qualities are difficult to assess. In practice preventative conservation is instead concerned with minimising the most serious and damaging changes which an object can undergo due to various agents of deterioration, aiming to safeguard the characteristics of an object which makes them significant.

Conservation can be described as 'a subject requiring considerable professional judgement where trade-offs and balances are exercised' (Caple 2011: 14). These balances and compromises are most apparent for objects which a museum wishes to display, as in these cases it is not only important for the objects to be presented in environments suited to the optimum viewing of museum visitors, but also that the objects remain in good condition with as little deterioration as possible. Conserving for use inevitably involves compromise and acceptance of some change within the object (Pye 2001: 29). Museum conservators are often urged to compromise the care of collections, by giving permission for objects to be displayed in conditions that

are less than optimal (Keene 2002: 114). Conserved objects in use are protected for a time; they are used carefully and gradually but may still be eventually used up. Conservation implies responsible and cautious use, objects are not expected to last forever although their lives are frequently much longer than ours are (Pye 2001: 27). By choosing to place the thangka paintings and Chinese dragon robes in their collections on display, the Chester Beatty Library and National Museum of Ireland have had to make such negotiations relating to the slight deterioration of objects which enables their public display. In both of these case studies, it is through the rotation of these delicate objects where compromise can be found.

Narrative Themes and the Display Case

The National Museum of Ireland and the Chester Beatty Library both utilise glass display cases to present their East Asian Collections to museum visitors. Display cases protect objects from damage by providing a micro-climate within which constant levels of relative humidity, temperature and controlled light can be maintained (Ambrose and Paine 2012: 138). They also protect the collection from obvious aggressors like pollution, dust and insects. From a conservation perspective, museum display cases must be built of museum grade components, be well sealed to keep out pollutants and dust, and secure to prevent damage from vibration and securely locked to stop theft. They must also be easily accessible to museum curators (Ambrose and Paine 2012: 138).

Carefully designed to the highest standards, the Chester Beatty Library's current display cases were made and installed in 2007. Of all the museums explored in this PhD study, this was the only institution that put emphasis on using non-reflective glass 'to try and remove the barrier' between object and visitor' (interview with Baldwin 2019). This mindfulness of visitor experience is further evidence of the object-centred approach of the Chester Beatty Library, making it clear that the focus of this museum is the care, visibility and prominence of the objects on display.

Agents of Deterioration

Regardless of the display case, there are other conservation threats to museum objects. On entering a museum, objects will be exposed to new and different conditions and used in a number of different ways which will expose them to

changes of environment, all of which may cause strain on the object (Pye 2001: 92). Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, direct physical forces can seriously damage an object, these forces can either be ‘sudden and catastrophic or long term and gradual’, the most common of which is improper handling procedures (Costain 2011: 24). Handling for study, photography, conservation and display all put strains on the object, and the movement between different micro-environments is also potentially damaging (Pye 2001: 92). Consequently, objects are placed under significant risk when a curator decides to alter or change museum display cases. By frequently rotating the dragon robes and thangka paintings the National Museum of Ireland and the Chester Beatty Library are juggling conservation demands with the importance of putting objects on display.

Museum collections are also under threat from water, pests (insects, vermin or mould), chemical agents from the museum environment (contaminants), ultraviolet (UV) and visible light radiation, temperature and humidity (Costain 2011: 25). Additional factors that affect deterioration may be inherent characteristics of the object and the materials it is made (Pye 2001: 89). The vast array of elements which are harmful to museum collections has broadened the responsibilities of museum curators and conservators. Nevertheless, some materials remain more vulnerable than others: textiles being particularly unstable and fragile.

The thangka paintings and the Chinese dragon robes which are rotated by the museums, can each be classed as textile objects. The thangka paintings can be further classified as flat textiles and the dragon robes as shaped textiles. The conservation needs of the objects belonging to each of these categories are diverse, therefore textile objects are particularly challenging objects to conserve and protect in a museum environment. For flat textiles, the interaction between the different materials often used in the manufacture of these objects needs to be taken into careful consideration. Wooden or metal poles or hanging fixtures attached to thangka paintings often deteriorate at a faster pace than the painting itself and then threaten the whole object (Pye 2001: 89). Hanging these objects within display cases also in many instances causes strain and damage to them. Ideally thangka paintings should remain rolled, in a display environment this is not ideal as the painting would therefore not be visible to the museum audience. Rotating these objects between

display and storage allows them resting periods in which they can be rolled and placed in storage.

Dragon robes often require hanging as they were manufactured to be worn on the body and therefore will be susceptible to greater damage if folded, creased or rolled in which instances they may lose their shape. Flat textiles are often displayed in isolation, but 'on the same plane and at the same height as its original usage' (Hall 1987: 206). This is the case for the thangka paintings displayed in the National Museum of Ireland, which are hung in display cases echoing how they would have been typically presented in temples. Regardless of the display strategy implemented, all textile objects provide museums with significant challenges in regard to conservation. Within the literature surrounding museum conservation practices, they are often referred to as the most delicate and at times the most valuable objects within a museum collection (Hall 1987; Thomson 1978; Pye 2001). In the case of the Chinese robes, hanging textile pieces in this way can cause conservation challenges as it subjects the materials to tension and other strains (Hall 1987: 204). Textiles are extremely vulnerable to ultraviolet radiation in light, as the natural fibres of wool, silk, cotton and linen are weakened and faded by light (Hall 1987: 208). Both the thangka paintings and the dragon robes have been dyed with natural dyes, therefore exposure to daylight or strong artificial lighting will cause the colours to fade (Hall 1987: 208).

All organic material is at risk under light. Consequently, display and exhibition galleries as well as other areas of the museum where collections are held (storage facilities and conservation laboratories) need to be designed and used with light levels in mind (Ambrose and Paine 2012: 239). Natural daylight often presents the greatest conservation hazard for textile objects on display. As a consequence, artificial light is usually chosen for textile displays (Hall 1987: 208), although the museum may well still need to control ultraviolet radiation from such lighting. The museum therefore must reach a compromise between the needs of an object from a conservation perspective, which is usually complete darkness, and the needs of the museum visitor from a display perspective, which is enough light to see the object comfortably (Ambrose and Paine 2012: 239). The deterioration caused by lighting predominantly affects the surface of the objects, as light can only damage

what it reaches. The only objects unaffected by light are stone, metal, ceramics and glass (Thomson 1978: 2). As previously mentioned, items like the thangka paintings displayed in the National Museum of Ireland are particularly sensitive to light. When Whitty spoke of the National Museum of Ireland collection, the delicacy of the thangka paintings in the collection was a significant conservation challenge. Whitty described to me that the painting medium of the thangkas is made up of vegetable oil, requiring a specialist conservation process, focussing on both textile and paper conservation (interview with Whitty 2018).

The custom in China and Japan for the owners of such hanging scrolls was to keep them rolled in boxes to be brought out only for limited periods (Thomson 1978: 35). The current display methods at the NMI do not adopt this tradition as they are open to the public's view all the time. Although, as previously discussed, the museum's rotation of these objects does allow them some rest from being constantly on display.

The Microclimate of an Exhibition

Temperature and humidity are key agents of deterioration within museum collections. Humidity is directly linked to temperature which will likewise have irreversible destructive effects on textile objects if not carefully considered and controlled in museum display areas. The heat generated by natural and artificial lighting, alongside the warmth required by visitors to museums, increases the rate of change in many objects. Heating thus has a significant effect on deterioration processes, since most chemical reactions become more rapid as the temperature rises (Pye 2001: 85). A consequence of rising temperatures is an accelerated rate of biological or chemical deterioration, therefore museum collections do not require high temperatures and a temperature of '18 degrees Celsius is acceptable for the display of mixed collections' (Ambrose and Paine 2012: 243). Both the Chester Beatty and the Albert Bender collections contain a wide variety of objects and follow these guidelines for mixed collections, although certain objects of course may require specific temperatures. The display case plays an important role in regulating special temperatures for select objects, by acting as a micro-environment in these instances. Although the temperature of museum displays is important, humidity,

lighting and air pollution are all much more important elements relating to the safeguarding of objects.

A museum measures the Relative Humidity (RH) of its display and storage areas, aiming to keep it stable at 55% for mixed collections. RH is the ratio of water vapour in the air to the amount that it could hold if fully saturated, expressed in percentage (Ambrose and Paine 2012: 242). The ability of air to hold water vapour increases with higher temperatures and decreases with lower ones. Organic materials, including textiles, also retain moisture and if this moisture is removed from natural textiles they become brittle and their fibres become easier to break (Hall 1987: 208). In damp conditions, when these materials become saturated with moisture, the absorption of moisture also commonly makes objects swell (Thomson 1978: 64). Many museum objects are manufactured from a variety of different materials joined together. Physical damage can thus be caused by juxtaposition of materials which expand and contract at different rates and different extents (Pye 2001: 89). In the case of the National Museum of Ireland's thangka paintings, the fabric painting will respond entirely differently to changes in moisture than the wooden hanging on which it is attached. Consequently, moisture change is potentially disastrous in the museum.

Air pollution is a further significant element for the conservation of the Albert Bender collection and the Chester Beatty collection, as both of these collections are housed in a busy city centre (Dublin). In city museums, the suspended dirt in the air gives rise to an obvious problem. Some of these particles are heavy enough to settle in still air, but the major concern is with those that are too small to ever settle under their own weight, and therefore enter into the furthest corners of museum buildings (Thomson 1978: 125). Both the museums have a lobby which provides a space separating the museum collections directly from the street outside. These spaces are both fitted with dust trap mats which provide another method of reducing the amount of dust particles entering the exhibition rooms (Hall 1987: 208). As well as poor air quality from burning fuels associated with urban areas, if a museum exhibition is on a direct route from the street visitors will bring dirt and traffic fumes into the exhibit (Hall 1987: 208). Textile objects in particular are at risk to the accumulation of dust and dirt particles, which often necessitates the risky operation of cleaning (Thomson

1978: 125). For city museums specifically, the acid released by burning petrol (sulphur), is strong and powerful and attacks many materials including organic materials like textiles. Often city museums are recommended to install a full ducted air conditioning system so that the whole exhibition space air passes through filters. As well as pollutants from outside, pollutants also arise from building and display materials, other museum objects and from substances such as domestic or industrial cleaning materials (Pye 2001: 86).

However, the glass cases surrounding objects also to some extent protect them from harmful particles in the air. This is most likely why during the personal interviews which I conducted, the curators responsible for the care and display of the Beatty and Bender collections placed a great deal of emphasis on the glass cases used. In these two case studies the importance of conserving and safeguarding the objects displayed is an important factor in understanding how the collections are interpreted and narrated. In particular, the Chester Beatty library places such an emphasis on the display case and the protection that it provides, that objects will only be displayed if they can be placed comfortably in existing cases. Mary Redfern, Curator of East Asia at the Chester Beatty Library, stated that objects are only selected for display if ‘they fit into an existing framework’ which includes the display case itself (interview with Redfern 2019). Therefore, in this sense, conservation challenges quite literally dictate which objects can go on display. Meaning that if an object cannot be safely protected by an existing case, it will not be selected for display. The higher conservation risks of the textile and paper objects existent in the Beatty and Bender collections contrast with the durable ceramic pieces of the O’Neill and Hunt collections, not discussed in this chapter for this reason. Therefore, for the former two collections conservation procedures are a greater stakeholder in determining narration.

Many factors which effect how these collections are perceived by the visitor, including lighting, the display case and the layout of the exhibition space (including the museum layout more generally: lobby) are directly derivative of the conservation practices put in place. Certain elements of the overall narrative told by these displays are consequently put in place not for interpretation but rather for conservation purposes. As a result, although the display cases and lighting effects used in these

exhibitions undoubtedly affect how visitors interact with and understand the collections, the purpose of these components are predominantly for preservation, impacting interpretation incidentally as a secondary role. This adds further understanding to the information previously gathered in Chapter Three. As was previously noted, lighting can evoke various emotional responses by the museum visitor and often low lighting techniques are implemented to mimic a temple or sacred space. In the display of the Tibetan Buddhist thangka paintings this theory can be applied, as undoubtedly these objects have deep connections to social, cultural and religious Buddhist practices. Although, in this case it would appear that any such effects of the lighting have been purely incidental, with the conservation of objects being the only influence in this area. Equally, the design impact of the display case previously noted holds additional significance when its conservation impact is also taken into account.

Final Thoughts on Display Challenge One: Seeking the Common Ground Between Display and Conservation

The display of objects in museums entails many practical conservation challenges, alongside the aesthetic and didactic role of the completed display itself. Throughout this section it has become apparent that in the museum, conservation although only one aspect of managing collections, is arguably the most important. The collections in the care of a museum form the principal resource from which all other activities flow (Ambrose and Paine 2012: 227).

By creating a carefully controlled environment for objects to be displayed in, museum curators and conservators find a common ground between display and conservation. Preventative conservation is therefore in some ways comparable to the functional uses of artefacts during their lifetimes. During their working lives many museum objects would have been maintained and repaired by their owners in order to ensure they remained ‘functional and effective’ (Caple 2011: 1). Similarly, museums maintain and preserve artefacts while applying them to a new use, the museum exhibition. However some objects, including delicate textile items, were not intended by their makers to last (Pye 2001: 93). All textiles made from natural and organic materials are subject not only to the wear and tear of use, but also to the material changes caused by deterioration. Also, an object’s previous use will have an effect

on change and deterioration regardless of the conservation techniques implemented (Pye 2001: 91). Therefore, in some cases there is only so much a museum can achieve through conservation, particularly in the case of the dragon robes and thangka paintings displayed by the National Museum of Ireland and the Chester Beatty Library.

By rotating these delicate objects the two case studies explored not only ensure that preventative measures have been put in place for the care of these items, but doing so also aids the museum in allowing the public access to a wider portion of the collection. A result of the funding and stakeholder pressures museums currently face is the need to demonstrate that collections are useful now (Keene 2002: 248). A current issue for museums is therefore the requirement to provide greater access to collections, through displaying a far larger proportion of collections and working with local communities and groups through these objects (Pye 2001: 20). Museums aim to make a greater proportion of their cultural objects visible, so that they are available and accessible to the social and cultural groups who may have ownership over them or an attachment to them. In this case protecting and preserving objects seen to be socially or culturally significant is a primary responsibility.

The challenge museums then face by presenting a wider proportion of collections to the public is that of interpretation. As ‘almost every time you put an object on display or simply take it out of its storage box and show it to a visitor you are interpreting it’ (Ambrose and Paine 2012: 119). Individuals will also interpret the objects in their own diverse ways by assigning their own ‘interests, beliefs, assumptions and knowledge’ (Ambrose and Paine 2012: 119). Just as there are many different views of or interpretations of the past so there are different possible views of and uses of objects (Pye 2001: 24). The East Asian textile objects presented by the National Museum of Ireland and the Chester Beatty Library have each been interpreted differently. However, the common ground between both is that in each scenario the significance of the object has been explained. Again, this demonstrates the requirement for today’s museums to present the usefulness, significance and educational value of collections. This reinstates the importance of conserving and safeguarding these objects for future generations.

Display Challenge Two: The Display of Religious Objects within Museum Spaces

Displaying East Asian religious objects within museums in the West is a problematic endeavour. Not least because curators must be mindful of the lack of prior knowledge of world religions amongst many visitors (Paine 2013: 8). As a result, the practice of exhibiting religious objects has recently been reconsidered by many museums and institutions, through processes of answering critical questions of 'what it means to represent people and cultures' (Myers 2001: 38). These relate to how religious objects should be understood in museum spaces, particularly the dichotomy between art versus artefact, an area explored in depth in Chapter Five. This relates to whether they are to be understood as objects that are still sacred, or as formerly sacred objects that are now art objects. In the museum, perhaps they are simultaneously objects of religious and artistic significance, depending on the visitors' own perception (Sullivan 2015: 2).

Within Western museum spaces East Asian religious objects face two great challenges, firstly interpreting for visitors how the object was understood in its East Asian religious context, secondly meeting the demands of all those people who feel the object is personally important to them (Paine 2013: 11). Individuals and groups experience connections to museum objects because of a variety of personal, social, cultural or religious motivations. This means that object significance may be different for different visitor groups. Museum curators and professionals are struggling to meet the needs of diverse populations and groups, in the case of the Chester Beatty Library's East Asian religious objects for example, these personal connections vary from Buddhist groups and East Asian cultural groups to one visitor noted during interview, who frequently visits a Buddhist statue in the collection 'to calm down' whenever she needs to (interview with Redfern 2019).

The discussion to follow will explore the display techniques used for comparable artefacts in National Museum of Ireland and the Chester Beatty Library. The objects considered are two Bodhisattva statues (see Figures 4.3 and 4.4) and two sets of Tibetan Buddhist thangka paintings (see Figures 4.5 and 4.6). Here I will be exploring the impact of the religious origin of these objects on the interpretation

strategies which currently define them within a museum setting. To provide the context for this discussion, I will first outline their seventeenth and eighteenth-century origins, next exploring how they have come to be displayed in Ireland. I will then discuss how these objects are currently interpreted and narrated in the museum. The materiality and portability of these objects and their endurance through time make them particularly susceptible to shifts in ownership and value, as will be revealed. Although the thangka paintings were referred to in the discussion surrounding museum conservation (Chapter Four: Display Challenge One), and the Buddhist statues will later briefly feature in a discussion surrounding art versus artefact (Chapter Five), in this chapter these objects will be explored with a focus on their religious significance and the consequence this holds for display practices.

Figure 4.3 Bronze Bodhisattva head (seventeenth-century China), National Museum of Ireland, Dublin (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Figure 4.4 Bronze Bodhisattva (eighteenth-century China), Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Figure 4.5 One of the two thangka paintings displayed in the Chester Beatty Library (eighteenth-century Tibet), Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Figure 4.6 One of the twelve thangka paintings displayed in the National Museum of Ireland (eighteenth-century China), National Museum of Ireland, Dublin (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

East Asian Buddhist Artefacts and Identity Construction

In exploring these objects, two key themes dominate: (1) effects on people's lives and identities, and (2) the role museums play in representing identities and cultures. Objects themselves are 'not simple props of history' (Gerritsen and Riello 2014: 3); instead they have meanings for the people who produce, use and own them. Therefore, the objects also constitute as markers of identity. As Tilley (2006: 61) argues, the object world is central to an understanding of the identities of individuals and societies because persons and things are in 'dynamic relation'. Through objects we can therefore grasp a greater understanding of ourselves and others. As a result, meaning is an ambivalent concept when applied to material culture, as it emerges from the relationships between objects and people.

Within museum exhibitions religious objects maintain their ability to effect and manipulate identities, however altered this representation and embodiment of identity may be. As a result, museums play an important role in determining understandings between cultures. Within the museum's mission statement the Chester Beatty Library claims to foster 'the promotion, appreciation and understanding of world culture, and the engagement with the peoples whose cultures are represented in the collections' (The Chester Beatty Library 2018a). The National Museum of Ireland on the other hand primarily aims to strengthen 'national pride', achieving this through the promotion of 'learning, creativity and inspiration' (National Museum of Ireland 2018b). In doing so, a primary strand of the NMI's current Master Vision Statement is working with 'communities to maximise impact and increase interaction at local, national and international level' (National Museum of Ireland 2018b). Therefore, it becomes apparent that although the Chester Beatty Library and the National Museum of Ireland have a different focus at the core of their institutional mission, both museums are dedicated to providing spaces that foster understanding and encourage interaction between diverse communities.

In regard to religious objects, the role of the contemporary Western museum can therefore be argued to be the provision of spaces where people of different religious backgrounds encounter the 'practices and beliefs of others', their sacred artefacts, religious cultures and traditions (Buggeln, Paine and Plate 2017: 3). Through their

exhibitions, museums can provide entirely new functions for religiously significant objects, or show how they function in ritual and religious contexts (Sullivan 2015: 1).

Thangka Paintings and their Contribution to Tibetan Society, Culture and Identity

If material arrangements matter in the formation of social life, then it follows that our understandings of cultures will be enriched by taking interrelationships between humans and materials into account (Stahl 2010: 150). The origin and production of the thangka in eighteenth-century Tibet provides an understanding of the original meanings and uses of these objects, which can be compared to their current position within a museum collection. It has been suggested (Myers 2001: 9) that the best way to achieve such an understanding, is to focus on how groups and individuals create value in objects. This can be demonstrated in relation to the thangka paintings, appreciation of which is quite minimal in the West, something which this study hopes to highlight and work towards correcting.

The thangka paintings currently exhibited in the Chester Beatty Library and the National Museum of Ireland can be classed as sacred objects. Something is sacred because it is a focus for 'the nexus of ritualized exchanges and the matrix of religious contestation' (Sullivan 2015: 1). This is certainty the case for the thangkas, which have a history of usage in Tibetan Buddhist practices. Overall few religions have held the effect on the material world that Buddhism has. Buddhism entirely altered the material world of East Asia, introducing new sacred objects, new symbols, buildings and ritual implements, as well as new ways of thinking about and interacting with these objects (Kieschnick 2003: 1). The recognition of the persistent role of Buddhism in the development of East Asian material culture can enhance our understanding of the history of Buddhism, and its function in East Asian society. However, from the earliest Buddhist texts to the present day, Buddhist monks have adopted principles which largely reject tangible objects (Kieschnick 2003: 2). Conversely, Buddhist practices can also develop a heavy reliance on the sculpted and painted image. Making the relationship between Buddhist artefacts, and the social and cultural practices which they are immersed in, complex and at times contested.

Buddhist art can be thought of as an ‘elaborate assemblage of images of divinities and objects’ (Fisher 1993: 11). Through artistic expression the faith largely relied on symbolic forms, including the earlier symbols of trees and wheels to later symbolic forms of the Buddha, and therefore has used symbols to a greater degree than most religions. Throughout the ages art has performed a vital function in Buddhist life. It is the visible expression of a people’s ideas aspirations, needs and hopes (Lauf 2002: 9). For the Tibetan peoples, the most consistent involvement with the spiritual world was the daily manipulations of objects in order to protect the individual and the community (Reynolds 1978: 57), displaying the importance of art objects to Tibetan daily life. All aspects of Tibetan art were thus determined by and orientated towards religion (Lauf 2002: 43).

It is a unique art form that is clearly discernible from that of neighbouring countries. Tibetans create art to open windows from the everyday world, to the ‘realm of pure wisdom and compassion’ (Rhie and Thurman 1991: 17). For this reason, the Tibetans believed art not to be human-made but in fact ‘a gift from enlightened beings themselves’ (Rhie and Thurman 1991: 36). Objects become the point of transition from the ordinary world to the sacred. As a result, a deeper understanding of Tibetan art can only be achieved by an acknowledgement of the basic ideas of Buddhist thought. It can be best comprehended when its religious meaning is understood alongside its artistic qualities. In Tibet, the creation of a work of art was a religious act, each stage of creation filled with prayers and rituals (Rhie and Thurman 1991: 385). The meanings contained in many mantras (a sound repeated in meditation) were thus part of the basic knowledge of the Tibetan artist (Lauf 2002: 45).

Tibetan painting was made under the supervision of Buddhist priests and had a liturgical function (Reynolds 1978: 85). The aesthetics of Tibetan Buddhist art is based upon ‘revealing the Buddhist understanding of the way things truly are’, therefore it is expressed primarily in terms of deities (Rhie and Thurman 1991: 39). Accordingly, iconography is a central element of Tibetan art and utmost care is taken to precisely depict deities. The contemplation of icons enabled Tibetans to call on the attributes of the deity pictured and thus to reach a realm beyond their normal

command. In praying to such an image, the individual sought to absorb its spiritual essence.

In Tibetan language, a painting that rolls up is called a thangka, ‘a thing that one unrolls’ (Rhie and Thurman 1991: 17). They were most commonly used to meditate upon and envisage deities. Once made these objects were seen to be empowered with the ‘mystic energy’ of the divinities which they represented (Reynolds 1978: 85). This religious art therefore aims not to be aesthetic but to make visible religious, meditational, purely spiritual and visionary contents so that the initiated may in turn relive them (Lauf 2002: 46). Thangkas are therefore objects used for a ritual of invocation of the deities and hence fulfil a totally different function from that of decoration. To someone outside Tibetan Buddhist culture this spiritual function of thangka paintings can only be indirectly appreciated. However, the ‘psychological intensity of this art is communicated across cultural barriers’ (Reynolds 1978: 85).

Most thangka paintings, including those held by the National Museum of Ireland and the Chester Beatty Library, contain a great variety of colours and an unrestricted use of different colours for the same motif. The handling of colour in Tibetan works of art is often ‘highly expressive, visionary and fantastic’ (Lauf 2002: 46). This can be explained by Buddhist yoga which leads to the ‘light of knowledge’ or the ‘dream state’, resulting in visions ‘which relativize all external laws of image colour and form’ (Lauf 2002: 46). The images depicted on Tibetan thangkas correspond more to an inner picture rather than an external realistic picture. For example, in many of the thangkas displayed in the National Museum of Ireland clouds appear in unrealistic colours and positions.

Thangka paintings can be grouped according to their pictorial content under five subject headings. These are, ‘historical or legendary representations’, ‘representations of the spiritual succession and hierarchy’, ‘representations of meditative contents’, ‘mandalas and cosmic diagrams’, and ‘visionary representations’ (Lauf 2002: 50). The twelve thangka paintings currently on display in the National Museum of Ireland fall under this first heading ‘historical or legendary representations’. In this first category, we find representations from the life of the Buddha, the Arhats, the Siddhas and the legends of saints or stories of Tibetan kings

(Lauf 2002: 50). In this case, the National Museum of Ireland thangkas each represent Arhats. Overall, there are sixteen Arhats, they are beings which have subdued their inner energy as a result of devout practice and whom have achieved spiritual enlightenment. Each Arhat represents one of the sixteen different places in Jambudvipa (the universe). In Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the Buddha asked sixteen of his followers to remain in the world and protect his teachings (Lauf 2002: 50).

One of the two thangka paintings on display in the Chester Beatty Library likewise depicts an Arhat (the Arhat Kalika). The second thangka painting displayed by the Chester Beatty Library belongs to the fourth category 'mandalas and cosmic diagrams', in this case the mandala of Mahasukha (great bliss). Mandalas are esoteric meditation diagrams embodying a particular doctrine (Lauf 2002: 50). Moreover, the display of the thangkas in the Chester Beatty Library is in keeping with the traditional hanging of these pieces. The paintings are hung by a fabric string, with a thin veil, a zhal-khebs, sewn on the top to traditionally protect the artworks form the smoke of butter lamps (Rhie and Thurman 1991: 387). Contrasting to this the veils have been removed from the pieces in the National Museum of Ireland and they are instead displayed in a way which is typical for the aesthetic viewing of art; in a well-lit area where they can be appreciated from all angles. The display of these objects will later be discussed in more detail. However, it is significant to note here that the Tibetan paintings contained in Western museum collections are each generally quite similar and are primarily of portable size and lasting material. They illustrate but a few forms of the many varied artworks which would have existed in eighteenth-century Tibet (Reynolds 1978: 85).

The Cultural History of the Bodhisattva and its representation of Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century China

Currently on display in the National Museum of Ireland, as part of the *Albert Bender Collection of Asian Art*, is a seventeenth-century Chinese bronze Bodhisattva head. Comparably, the Chester Beatty Library currently displays an eighteenth-century Chinese bronze Bodhisattva (Kannon, the Bodhisattva of Compassion). As done for the thangka paintings, I will explore their original cultural significance as Buddhist objects in seventeenth and eighteenth-century China. Briefly exploring their origins in

East Asian religious tradition, allows a contrast to be later made to their current role in a Western museum setting.

Bodhisattvas first made an appearance in many early Indian images of the Buddha (Bao, Tian and Lane 2004: 28). Images of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas came to China with Buddhism, they brought with them the belief that images could 'contain sacred power and demand propitiation' (Kieschnick 2003: 281). The doctrine of the Bodhisattva was developed by Mahayana Buddhism (Lauf 2002: 60). Bodhisattvas placed an 'emphasis on the ultimate goal of salvation' (Bao, Tian and Lane 2004: 28). Consequently, these second level images of Buddhism rapidly assumed major positions, often becoming more important than the historical Buddha. Bodhisattva means 'hero of enlightenment' (Rhie and Thurman 1991: 120), consequently, they are seen to be 'enlightened beings' (Bao, Tian and Lane 2004: 28).

Bodhisattva refers to any being (male or female, human or animal) who has denied perfect enlightenment in order to save all beings from suffering, and has vowed to persist in that quest for as many lifetimes as it takes to accomplish it (Rhie and Thurman 1991: 120). The role of Bodhisattvas as non-gendered entities, has recently led to their inclusion in a current (since June 2019) National Museum of Ireland programme entitled the *Rainbow Revolution* (see Figures 4.7 and 4.8 below), prompted by the National Museum of Ireland's first-time participation in the 2019 *Dublin Pride* celebrations (National Museum of Ireland 2019). This initiative includes a new trail (*Rainbow Trail*), which visitors can follow through the museum's galleries. Thus, within this new museum context the meaning of the Bodhisattva has been interpreted not as religious but rather as a method of including LGBTI+ representation into the museum's narrative. However, this trail only adds an additional layer of interpretation to narratives already existent in the display of this object, as the museum's original contextual information is displayed alongside this new interpretative strategy.

Figure 4.7 Guanyin (eighteenth-century China), National Museum of Ireland, Dublin (2020). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

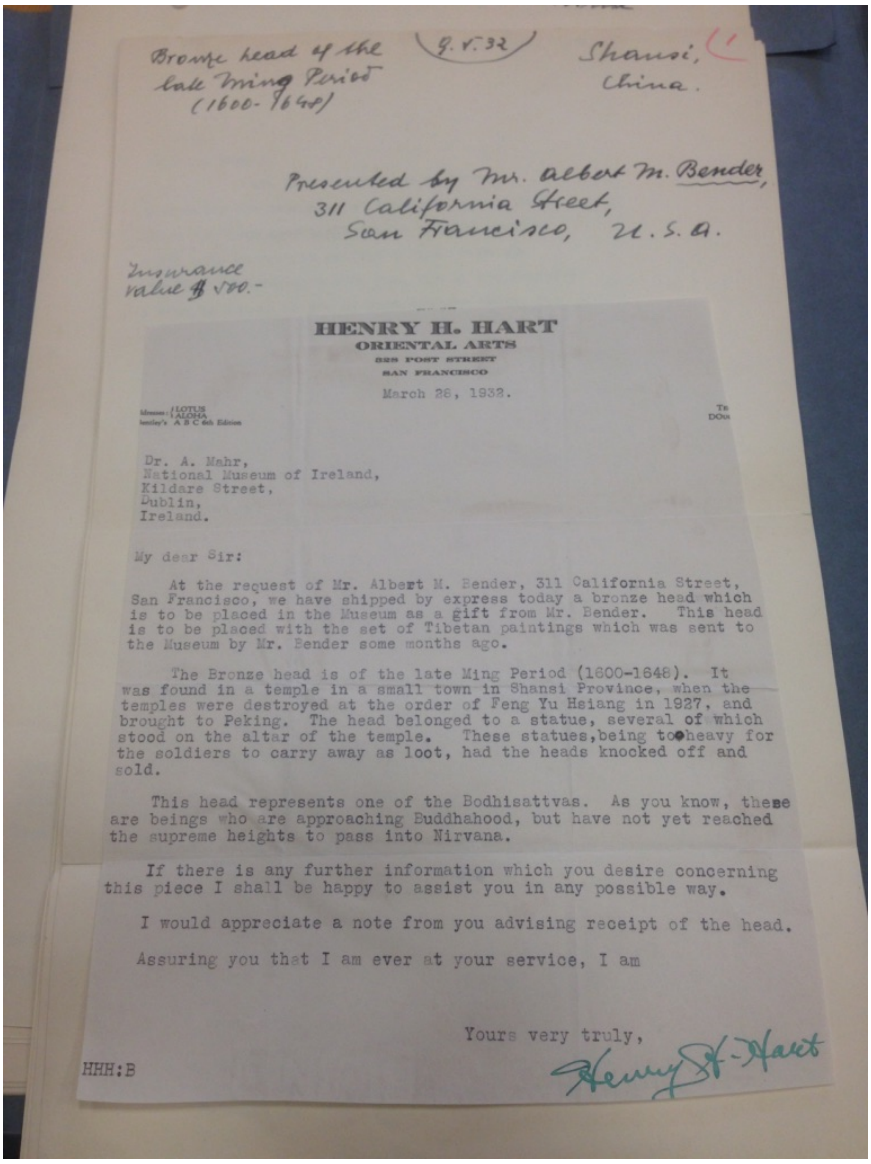
Figure 4.8 Guanyin (eighteenth-century China), label shows the inclusion of this object as item nine within the *Rainbow Revolution* trail, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin (2020). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

To further explore the religious context of these objects, a Bodhisattva can either be a human or a 'heavenly being' (Lauf 2002: 60). Their goodwill toward others drives them to develop godlike powers, so that they become almost indistinguishable from the Buddha (Rhie and Thurman 1991: 120). A Bodhisattva is therefore an active person who carried the teaching of 'benevolence and compassion' out into the world. It became a model of compassion and an active ideal of Buddhism (Lauf 2002: 18). By developing this ideal, Mahayana acquired the great and dynamic force which made it a universal religion spreading right across Asia (Lauf 2002: 60). As religious objects can be seen to encapsulate, 'the memory of a cultural group' (Candlin and Guins 2009: 1). As a consequence, through the Bodhisattva the cultural memory of Mahayana Buddhists can consequently be comprehended.

Deities, like the Bodhisattva, were known to worshipers by their responsibilities and most of the popular images exhibited a standard set of attributes poses and gestures (Fisher 1993: 13). The positions and gestures of the hands of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are particularly significant. These hand gestures are known as 'the mudras', they are very important to Buddhism, for they serve as actions which teach different meanings (Bao, Tian and Lane 2004: 27). Accordingly, to be an artist of Buddhism it was important to first learn all the poses and hand gestures of the Buddha, so that these rules could continue to be followed. As the Bodhisattva displayed in the National Museum of Ireland is only the remains of a detached head, the hand gestures that it depicted are unknown. The museum display of this partial Bodhisattva thus alters its meaning entirely.

The text panel displayed alongside this object tells us that it was collected by Albert Bender during the aftermath of the collapse of the Qing Dynasty. The text panel also recounts a letter from art dealer Henry H. Heart to the museum's then Keeper of Antiquities (Adolf Mahr) dated the 28th March 1932 (see Figure 4.9 below). Stating that the bronze head 'was found in a small town in Shaanxi Province when the temples were destroyed at the order of Feng Yu-hsiang in 1927, and brought to Peking' (Heart 1932). Also, that that the head 'belonged to a statue, several of which stood on the altar of the temple' (Heart 1932). Further information found in this letter not used on the text panel is that 'these statues, being too heavy for the solders to

carry away as loot, had the heads knocked off and sold' (Heart 1932). This further information explains why only the head of this Bodhisattva statue came to belong in a museum collection, therefore adding further context to how and why the statue became broken. Nevertheless, the text panel displayed alongside this object discloses much of the information given in this 1932 letter by Heart, providing a very open and honest account of how this object came to be in a museum collection, in particular in Albert Bender's collection. As a final point, the text panel then goes on to provide further information about the Chinese general Feng Yu-hsiang (1882-1948), providing context to this period of Chinese history.



Bronze head of the late Ming Period (1600-1644)

9.V.32

Shansi, China.

Presented by Mr. Albert M. Bender, 311 California Street, San Francisco, U.S.A.

Insurance value $ 100.-

HENRY H. HART
ORIENTAL ARTS
325 POST STREET
SAN FRANCISCO

March 28, 1932.

Dr. A. Mahr,
National Museum of Ireland,
Kildare Street,
Dublin,
Ireland.

My dear Sir:

At the request of Mr. Albert M. Bender, 311 California Street, San Francisco, we have shipped by express today a bronze head which is to be placed in the Museum as a gift from Mr. Bender. This head is to be placed with the set of Tibetan paintings which was sent to the Museum by Mr. Bender some months ago.

The Bronze head is of the late Ming Period (1600-1648). It was found in a temple in a small town in Shansi Province, when the temples were destroyed at the order of Feng Yu Hsiang in 1927, and brought to Peking. The head belonged to a statue, several of which stood on the altar of the temple. These statues, being too heavy for the soldiers to carry away as loot, had the heads knocked off and sold.

This head represents one of the Bodhisattvas. As you know, these are beings who are approaching Buddhahood, but have not yet reached the supreme heights to pass into Nirvana.

If there is any further information which you desire concerning this piece I shall be happy to assist you in any possible way.

I would appreciate a note from you advising receipt of the head.

Assuring you that I am ever at your service, I am

Yours very truly,

Henry H. Hart

HHH:B

Figure 4.9 Letter to Adolf Mahr from Henry H. Heart discussing the Bodhisattva head (currently held within NMI archive), National Museum of Ireland, Dublin (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

The Bodhisattva held by the Chester Beatty Library remains intact and is displayed in its entirety. The CBL has recognised that this Bodhisattva depicts Kannon, the personification of infinite compassion. In keeping with this Bodhisattvas' role, it portrays the varada mudra hand gesture. In this mudra, the hand is open with the fingers and thumb pointing upwards. As can be seen in this Bodhisattva, this gesture is usually depicted with the left hand which is sitting level to the chest. It represents and expresses the energy of compassion (Beer 2003: 169).

The ideology and interpretive frameworks placed around material objects in seventeenth and eighteenth-century China, would have been very different to those which are placed around concepts of material culture in the West today. The significance of Buddhist material culture thus depends 'on specific historical and geographical fields of usage' (Shelton 2000: 155). Meaning that such religious objects, including Bodhisattva statues, would be understood differently within different cultural contexts and different periods of history. This is a concept that is prominent within current research surrounding both material culture studies and museum studies. The central hypothesis is that the significance of material culture is, heavily dependent on context. Furthermore, this context is a cultural construction and is constantly in flux, as objects do not possess 'fixed identities' (Tythacott 2011a: 7). The greatest difficulties in assessing the impact of Buddhism on Chinese material culture therefore do not relate to a shortage of data, but rather to how we interpret it (Kieschnick 2003: 23). Nevertheless, historical objects like the Bodhisattva, possess a symbolic factor which is reminiscent of past meanings, as these are 'never totally disclaimed' (Shelton 2000: 155). Generally, it is these past meanings of objects that are articulated through museum displays as will next be explored.

Display of Bodhisattvas and Thangka Paintings and the Generation of Meaning

Secular museums in the West commonly utilise objects to explain the religion and the culture behind them, and this is what museum visitors have generally come to expect in museum displays (Paine 2013: 101). Consequently, once a religious object is placed in a museum collection it achieves a dual status; 'for the viewer it is an object from the past, while for the curator it is an object for the present and future' (Walker 1997: 257). Meaning that museum visitors expect objects to represent an aspect of or a story from the past, while museum curators view the same object as a

method of continuing to share the past with future generations. However, these representations can equally be seen to represent the philosophy and techniques of the curators and the aims and objectives of the museum, as every museum has an underlying philosophy, whether or not it makes it explicit or even recognises it (Paine 2013: 105). Utilising objects to represent cultures and religions in this way has therefore become a highly debated topic in recent years. The debate has made it clear that exhibitions are not only media of representation but also forms of cultural production (Myers 2001: 38).

Curators have long since recognised that many museum objects were originally on display in temples, shrines or monasteries and were at one time religiously significant to the communities that created and used them (Sullivan 2015: 2). Accordingly, many critics and theorists have equally pointed out that such representations subjectify others by acting as ‘a dominant knowledge’ over their identities (Sullivan 2015: 38). This reinstates that those represented by museums need to have some control over their representation, and as a consequence, museum studies research states that it is current best practice for museums which hold religious objects, to use those objects to promote mutual understanding between people (Paine 2013: 12). The mission statements of the NMI and the CBL previously discussed confirm the significance of this museum function. Although both of these institutions have significant differences in the goals which they set out to achieve, and neither directly state their goals for the religious objects in their collections, they both do reinstate the importance of working with diverse communities and promoting understanding.

The design of museum exhibitions which present religious objects to the public is becoming important. The design of a museum exhibition can heavily influence, if not actually determine the way visitors understand the objects displayed, and subsequently the meaning he or she gives to them (Paine 2013: 107). The atmosphere of the display is therefore as significant to the interpretation of objects as museum text or illustrative material. However, despite the growing use of technology in museum exhibitions object interpretations still heavily rely on the classical method of the object label (Paine 2013: 107). This is evident in the display of the religious objects previously discussed in the National Museum of Ireland and the Chester

Beatty Library. Each exhibition utilises a sizeable amount of text alongside the objects in order to explain them to the museum visitor. Similarly, each of these exhibitions presents the objects in a way which is somewhat typical for the display of religious material. Paine (2013: 107) has noted that religious icons displayed in Western museums are most commonly presented in dimly lit rooms painted in a rich red or purple.

Both exhibitions use dim lighting effects, as mentioned earlier in this chapter (Section One) this is primarily for conservation purposes. Although it can be argued that such lighting effects ‘evoke candlelight’ and enable the objects to ‘at once be recognisable as sacred’ (Paine 2013: 107). Therefore, alongside providing protection for the objects from the damaging effects of strong lighting, the dim lighting incorporated also has a secondary atmospheric effect. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the Chester Beatty Library utilises the colour red on the walls of the exhibition space to make a visible division between East/Southeast Asian religious objects and objects belonging to other cultural or religious groups (see Figure 4.10 below), an example being the large collection of Christian artefacts displayed in a section where the walls have been painted purple, and Islamic objects which have been displayed in a blue exhibition space. In each of these spaces, coloured accents on text panels and labels also correspond with the overall colours of each exhibition space. Similarly, the thangka paintings in the National Museum of Ireland are displayed in an entirely red themed room.

Figure 4.10 Red archway separating the display of East Asian religious objects from those of other cultures, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

There are also clear distinctions between the displays of religious objects presented by each institution. The Chester Beatty Library has displayed their examples of Tibetan art in an alcove (see Figure 4.11 below), separated from the rest of the exhibition. A text panel at the entrance of this alcove, gives information regarding Buddhism in Tibet and Mongolia. The intention is that the visitor will enter this area of the exhibit with the cultural origins and religious significance of these objects in mind.

It is also significant to note that this museum displays all of its objects of religious importance in the same area of the museum, entirely separate from East Asian objects which could instead be regarded for their artistic merit (the distinctions between art and artefact classifications will later explored in Chapter Five).

Figure 4.11 Area displaying Tibetan art, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

On entering the display of Tibetan Buddhist material culture, there appears another text panel, this time detailing the role that monks (lamas) have within Tibetan Buddhism. Therefore, when the visitor then views the thangka painting displayed next to this they will potentially be able to view it in light of the position it would have held within Tibetan Buddhist culture. The thangka paintings themselves are displayed alongside labels. These provide information regarding what the thangkas depict, thus information is given on the Arhat and mandala illustrated. It is also significant that the Chester Beatty Library has attempted to include aspects of display which create a sense of how these items would have typically appeared in Tibetan temples. As previously mentioned these objects have been hung with their zhal-khebs still intact (a thin veil which typically protected the painting from smoke

and other environmental threats), and thus appear as they would have when suspended in temples. This approach to display is therefore extremely sensitive, as it helps the visitor to engage with the original religious purpose of these objects, allowing the thangkas to be appreciated through the context of their cultural origins in Tibet. The thangkas are not displayed solely through the lens of Western perspective. By adding the zhal-khebs, the objects can be experienced by the museum visitor how they were intended by their original makers. This goes some way to removing the lens of 'Orientalist discourse' (which can be defined as the imitation or depiction of aspects of the Eastern world in the West (Said 1991; Codell and Macleod 1998; Kennedy 2000; Mackenzie 2012)) from how these objects are perceived and understood.

On entering the exhibition area displaying these objects, Tibetan sounds that would have been used in Buddhist rituals and practices begin to play. A repertoire of movements and sounds was developed by the Tibetan clergy, quite distinct from the rituals of Buddhism in other Asian countries, to aid in the journey toward spiritual mastery (Reynolds 1978: 58). By playing this music, the museum is immersing the visitor further into an understanding of the cultural context of the artefacts they are viewing. As a final point, it is also significant that the museum has removed labels where possible, and gives this information instead on a laminated card that the museum visitor can look at if they need more information. This practice is clearly an attempt by the museum to place the focus on the objects so that they can thus be appreciated for what they are by museum visitors, rather than only being understood through the museum's interpretation of them. Therefore, the museum has attempted in some way to allow the visitor the ability to view these objects through the lens of their cultural origin in East Asia, and not through the lens of Western perspective. As the museum has incorporated accompanying contextual information and display techniques (sound and the zhal-khebs) that will allow visitors to apprehend the use and purpose of these objects as sacred religious items. Consequently, regardless of the fact that this collection has been assembled by a Western male who holds connections to Ireland (as are each of the four case studies explored in this PhD), the Chester Beatty Library has ensured that this is not the only context in which the objects are perceived by the visitor. For this reason, the approaches to interpretation and narration put in place by the CBL are effective at presenting a broad picture of

the diversity of contexts and layers of information that can be embodied by a single object.

In contrast to this, the thangka paintings displayed in the National Museum of Ireland (see Figure 4.12 below) are displayed alongside art objects also in the Albert Bender collection. In the NMI the thangka paintings are displayed in a room which also contains nineteenth-century woodblock prints (see Figure 4.13 below) by Japanese printmaker Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798-1861). As a result, the first impression is that the thangka paintings should also be seen as works of art. The paintings are also displayed in a similar fashion; in well-lit cases where they can be appreciated from all angles. The collection of thangka paintings held by the National Museum of Ireland is sizeable and dominates the display room; each painting is suspended in the centre of the exhibition space. This display choice differs entirely from the Chester Beatty Library's approach, where a smaller collection of paintings is enclosed within a small dimly-lit space which the museum visitor has to enter in order to view them. In the case of the CBL the visitors viewing experience is more intimate and personal, than the large, well-lit and open display space of the NMI.

Figure 4.12 Area displaying Tibetan thangka paintings, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Figure 4.13 Prints by artist Utagawa Kuniyoshi displayed alongside the thangkas, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

The National Museum of Ireland exhibition presents each of the twelve paintings alongside red text panels suspended within the glass cases. Each of these text panels presents a new piece of information regarding the thangkas. This includes information regarding Tibetan Buddhism, what a thangka is, the function of thangkas in Tibetan Buddhist practices, how thangkas were produced, the Chinese artistic influences that can be seen in each of the paintings, what an Arhat is and each of the Arhats depicted. Therefore, many sub-narratives surrounding the context, cultural origin and the religious function of the thangka paintings have been made available for the visitor. Nevertheless, the master narrative of this exhibition remains to be that of the object's collector, Albert Bender. The narrative of the large text panels throughout the National Museum of Ireland exhibition space describe Bender's life and connections to Ireland. Equally, the NMI display style does not present the objects in the context of their original use, as the Chester Beatty Library has achieved.

Accordingly, two entirely diverse interpretative strategies have been used to understand similar objects in each of these institutions. The evident differences in interpretative narratives are a reflection of the mission statements of each institution. Within the institutional mission statements previously discussed, it became apparent that the CBL primarily aims to understand 'the international cultural heritage embodied in the collections' (The Chester Beatty Library 2018a), while the NMI's primary mission is to 'preserve objects relating to the history and culture of Ireland' (National Museum of Ireland 2018b). The thangka paintings in each museum have therefore become a reflection of wider institutional goals. The NMI thangka paintings are used in a narrative of Irish collector Albert Bender, and the CBL examples are predominantly used to represent Tibetan cultural traditions and practices.

The overall experience of viewing the thangka paintings in the NMI is entirely different from that presented by the Chester Beatty Library. The exhibition in the CBL overtly presents these objects as sacred, displayed amongst other religious objects and in a way in which the museum visitor can grasp their significance in Tibetan Buddhist practices. The National Museum of Ireland appears at first glance to present its collection of thangka paintings as artworks, although they do rectify this with the content of the text panels. One of the text panels presented in this exhibition begins by stating, 'these thangka paintings whether seen merely as works of art or consecrated to religion' (wall text, National Museum of Ireland). As a result, the National Museum of Ireland has decided to be open to different interpretations of them as either religious objects or works of art. They have chosen instead to enable the viewer the ability to decide for themselves the significance of these objects, and if they should be seen as aesthetic or sacred.

Labels and text panels consequently have a central role in directing the thoughts and opinions of museum visitors, and are central to any exhibition. In regard to the Bodhisattvas displayed in each museum, the label alongside the bronze Bodhisattva head in the National Museum of Ireland details the donation of this object by Albert Bender; one of the first of many donations this collector made to the museum. As previously discussed, it also provides background information about this object by referencing a letter the art dealer Henry H. Heart sent to the museum alongside this object in 1932. The information given is therefore very focused on the object's place

in the museum and how it came to be in the museum collection, rather than the religious meaning of the object itself. This is a narrative which runs throughout the NMI exhibition, as information surrounding Bender, his donations to the museum, and the NMI curator he made donations through features on many of the text panels in this exhibition space.

On the other hand, the bronze Bodhisattva displayed in the Chester Beatty Library is presented alongside a label detailing the religious significance of this object, this message is consistent throughout the museum's galleries as the cultural context and religious significance of each religious object displayed has been detailed. This label discusses the meanings this object would have held in eighteenth-century China, as the personification of infinite compassion. A large text panel placed behind this object also contributes some general information on what Mahayana Buddhism its. It therefore becomes apparent that the main goal of the Chester Beatty Library is to educate museum visitors about the Buddhist religion. As previously mentioned, this relates directly to the mission statement of the CBL, which aims to promote understanding between communities. It is typical for museums in the West to display East Asian religious objects in a way which draws out their cultural and religious importance. The Victoria and Albert Museum has utilised a similar approach to the Chester Beatty Library in displaying Buddhist material, here the interpretative narratives included equally promote the cultural, social and religious significance of the objects (The Victoria and Albert Museum 2018). It is rare for Western museums to present a display narrative which discloses the trade and collection of objects and how they have come to reside in a museum collection. For this reason, the National Museum of Ireland's approach is innovative, presenting a narrative of museum collections which is often concealed within a display environment.

Museologist Walker (1997: 262) has argued there is a further unwritten label when an object is selected for display, based on the judgement that an object has been 'collected and [is] deemed suitable for display in a museum'. It is important to be aware of the impact of the unnatural setting religious objects are placed into when removed from temples or shrines and located within a museum collection. By taking objects out of context a museum momentarily strips them of their identity and value (Paine 2013: 13). All museums, including the case studies of this PhD, because of

their collecting practices and methods of categorisation have perhaps unknowingly exacerbated the problem of de-contextualization (Gerritsen and Riello 2014: 8). The first task of a curator is to give the object once collected a new meaning for its new life within a museum collection. This bestows curators with the responsibility to determine how museum visitors will understand and respond to religions and cultures.

However, the agency of the museum visitor will also play a crucial role. It is also important to know that objects do not belong to a single time, as we are often led to believe by museum labels (Gerritsen and Riello 2014: 6). They are instead a result of layers of use, and as each of the objects discussed in this chapter have been actively amassed by collectors (Albert Bender and Alfred Chester Beatty), it is important to be mindful of the journeys these objects have travelled. Religious objects held by museums are therefore complex entities that can only ever be partially understood and recovered (Gerritsen and Riello 2014: 8). Also, is clear that far more objects have not survived and museum collections can only ever present a partial picture of the material culture of religions, cultures and societies.

Final Thoughts on Display Challenge Two: The Museum Display of Religious Objects

In exploring both the cultural backgrounds of religious objects and their current display in Irish museum spaces, it has become apparent that material forms do not simply mirror pre-existing social distinctions, ideas, symbolic systems or values. They are instead the very medium through which these values and social distinctions are constantly reproduced, legitimised and transformed (Tilley 2006: 61). Material culture is thus inseparable from culture, society and in this case religion. Accordingly, objects have a unique power to speak to people, and do so on a different level to words: through ‘silent speech’ (Tilley 2006: 61). In the case of the CBL the Bodhisattva and Tibetan paintings displayed speak narratives of cultural practice, religious tradition and social identity. While similar objects within the NMI speak of their journey to a museum collection, their trade and collection, the individuals who came into contact with them, their cultural origins, aesthetic value and to a lesser extent religious tradition.

As has been discovered in this investigation, an object's value shifts over time as different people come into contact with it. In the case of the objects which are the focus of this study there are three prominent stages or shifts: their usage by Buddhist religious groups, their entry into personal collections of Albert Bender and Alfred Chester Beatty; and their eventual entry into the National Museum of Ireland and the Chester Beatty Library. Outside of museum spaces religious objects are already deeply embedded with meaning, and when they arrive into a museum collection they gain further meanings and purposes. When these objects reach public museums, we can reasonably ask that they 'express themselves in all the voices they can' (Paine 2013: 114). In the two case studies which this chapter explored, it has become evident that the institutional mission of the museum impacts the voices which objects narrate. The focus of the Chester Beatty Library is the cultures represented by these objects and that of the National Museum of Ireland is the connections the objects hold to Ireland through their collector. Nevertheless, in each case the objects present a variety of contexts surrounding their backgrounds, cultural origins and the religions which they represent. Therefore, the narratives presented by the CBL and the NMI are not singular and in each case, represent a variety of voices and perspectives.

As museums are simply a medium for viewing material culture, there exists 'a severe limit on what we can ask them to do' (Paine 2013: 113). Regardless if museums are to make a real contribution to the debates surrounding the role of religious objects in museum collections, they will have to take risks, also allowing groups and individuals the ability to interact with the objects in their own way (Paine 2013: 117). For the two case studies explored in this chapter the inclusion of source communities in the design and use of displays is limited, and the interpretation strategies used are traditional for a Western museum space. Therefore, more risks could be taken. It would be interesting to see how East Asian source communities would interpret these objects, removing them entirely from the context of their collectors. Museums can equally show more courage in how they approach the interpretation of religious objects, as there is a common reliance on traditional methods of display; presenting what are religious objects as either cultural artefacts or art objects.

In interpreting religious objects museum professionals are too frequently led by institutional missions and objectives; the incorporation of the Bodhisattva in the current National Museum of Ireland LGBTI+ tour being an example. This can be read as beneficial because it enables objects to be reinterpreted in ways which allows them to connect with contemporary issues and challenges faced by Western museums and societies today. However, in doing so there is a risk that another important layer of the object's context, significance and meaning is overlooked. This, risks misconceptions arising from the presentation of an object in a way never intended by its original creators, repressing visitor understanding of the object's own history and in this case the misrepresentation of religious tradition. In doing so the National Museum of Ireland has appropriated this East Asian Bodhisattva for Western purposes, by appropriating the object for a current social issue. Using objects of East Asian cultures for the advancement of the West is something which the Western museum has been responsible for since the nineteenth century. The stories told and ideas revealed through religious objects in museum spaces has potential to make significant impact in society, but only if museums engage constructively in new ways. If museum professionals were to hold less reliance on institutional aims and traditional display methods, advancement could be made towards the promotion of understanding between communities.

Chapter Four Conclusion

This chapter explored the narrative consequences of two primary challenges faced by museums when placing East Asian collections on display: conservation and the presentation of religion in a museum environment. Both of these challenges have emerged as predominant topics of interest from the interviews conducted with museum professionals, prompting their further exploration in this chapter. In fact, each of these challenges are recognised in the wider museum sector, affecting many museum practices. In each case, decisions and compromises must be made. In all display circumstances where either of these two display challenges come into play, careful consideration therefore must occur in order to ensure inaccuracies and miscalculations are avoided, as in each case the after effects are much harder (if at all possible) to correct.

The conservation challenges faced by museum professionals can trigger harmful effects if not dealt with appropriately. Here worst-case scenarios initiate physical and visual changes in the object. When conservation needs have not been met, this culminates with the physical destruction or altogether loss of the object. The oversights in terms of conservation needs therefore can trigger tangible physical damage. The second display challenge explored, can equally cause harmful effects when handled inappropriately. The difficulties encountered when displaying religious objects in a public museum setting, are primarily challenges of interpretation. In this case oversights made when classifying objects into art or artefact categories, and when interpreting and displaying religious objects, triggers intangible or emotive harm. The damage which can be occasioned by incorrectly or unethically interpreting and displaying religious objects predominantly affects representation, understanding and identity construction. Most commonly this occurs through the oversight or misrepresentation of particular identities (group, individual or cultural), or failing to perceive and acknowledge a particular value or significance embedded in the object and its use. In regard to cultural objects, this can in turn trigger prejudice and the misconception of cultural traditions and beliefs.

Chapter Five
The Theoretical Challenges of Displaying East Asian Collections in Ireland

This chapter will explore two theoretical challenges encountered when displaying East Asian collections in Ireland. These two areas have emerged from the research conducted, particularly that of Chapters Three and Four, also emerge as topical areas in the data gathered through the interview research conducted. These two areas are the categorisation and interpretation of objects into either art or artefact categories, and the perception of the museum visitor.

In exploring the narration, interpretation and display of East Asian museum collections so far, it has become evident that two main interpretation approaches are in operation. East Asian objects are generally amalgamated into one of two categories within a Western museum environment. They can either be seen as aesthetic art objects or cultural artefacts. As aesthetic objects, they are primarily appreciated for their visual attributes and aesthetic qualities. Conversely as cultural artefacts they are seen to embody knowledge of the culture and time within which they originated, and are largely appreciated for their use value and ability to impart knowledge. This holds major implications for how such objects are to be valued and understood, and also presents challenges surrounding the validity of interpretation strategies. The approach taken largely stems from the classification systems, interpretative strategies and display methods utilised by each museum when classifying the objects and presenting them to the public through exhibitions. This chapter (Theoretical Challenge One) therefore goes far deeper into the distinction between these two methods of observing, interpreting and displaying objects. It does this by further exploring what it means to perceive an object as a cultural artefact, and how this perception changes when an object is instead seen aesthetically.

The perception of the museum visitor affects the presentation and exhibition of any museum collection. In my analysis of the curator interviews, as compared to the visitor interviews, I found variances between the intentions of the museum curator and the actual perceptions of the museum visitor (particularly in the case of the Chester Beatty Library). In all circumstances, a museum display is subject to the reading, opinions and experiences of the museum visitor. These personal influences

and individual agency thus largely establish the meanings given to the objects on display by the individuals viewing them, and in every case the viewing experience of the display and the meanings expressed through the collection will remain entirely personal. The effect of personal perception on the overall meaning and significance of a museum collection will be further unravelled in this chapter (Theoretical Challenge Two). By doing so, a better understanding of the influence personal perception possesses in a museum display setting will be advanced.

Theoretical Challenge One: Artefact or Art?

How objects are interpreted within a museum space is becoming an increasingly significant matter, with the collection and interpretation of objects playing a vital role in the definition of cultural value (Cummings and Lewandowska 2000: 12), it is because objects often express cultural values, beliefs and identities that there exists a continuous urge to control, classify and interpret them. In doing so objects are regularly utilised 'as a sophisticated means of making both ourselves and our world knowable' (Cummings and Lewandowska 2000: 16). Exploring how and why objects are interpreted and classified into certain groups not only divulges information surrounding museum functioning, but also regarding wider societal structures. Likewise, advancing a greater awareness of the classifications and interpretations imposed on museum objects is now a prominent concern for today's museum professionals. When objects are placed on display in a museum they are loaded with the values, principles and ideals of the society and institutions in which they have been classified and interpreted. This is rarely articulated in exhibitions. In this chapter I explore these issues in relation to the classifications of East Asian objects in museums in Ireland. The Chester Beatty Library's East Asian collection and the Ulster Museum's O'Neill collection will be used as primary examples in defining the two opposing classifications placed on East Asian objects upon entering a museum setting, that of the cultural artefact and that of the aesthetic art object.

Classification and its Influence on Meaning-Making

We have an innate ability to classify things, thus 'to classify is human' (Bosoker and Star 2000: 1). We classify things to 'simplify our world and make sense of it' (Batley 2014: 1). Museum classification systems not only categorise objects into various

groups but they also reflect society at large, as classification is a process which organises ‘the environment into categories or groups or persons, objects and events according to their similarities’ (Deschamps and Devos 1998: 4). It plays a specific part in structuring the environment, by systemising and simplifying it (Deschamps and Devos 1998: 4). In regard to objects classification divides them into groups, which are or seem to be similar according to certain criteria. Subsequently, a group is a collection of elements which have in common one or several features. Thus, classification is ‘essentially just grouping, putting like with like’ (Bouman 2005: 1). It is thereby imposing some sort of structure on our understanding of the things around us.

The purpose of classification is to allow us the ability to not have to understand everything we experience as unique; instead, we can place it within a structure that recognises its properties without having to make individual sense of it. However, the core problem which occurs when objects are classified into distinct groups, is that this emphasises both the similarities within the same category and the differences between categories. By putting objects together, they are therefore also separated from different subjects (Bouman 2005: 1). Classificatory systems play a large role in the establishment of forms of social and symbolic difference (Woodward 1997: 29). They apply a principle of difference, dividing populations into at least two groupings: ‘us/them, self/other’ (Woodward 1997: 29). Classificatory systems are always constructed around difference and the ways in which differences are marked out. Social control (of individuals and groups in society) is therefore often exercised through processes of categorisation. Individuals who fall outside a society’s perceived ‘norms’ are relegated to the status of outsider. However, this difference can be either construed negatively as the exclusion and marginalization of those who are defined as other. Or alternatively it can be celebrated as a source of diversity (Woodward 1997: 35). Moreover, regardless of the significant role classifications play in promoting ‘social and moral order’, the majority of individuals are unconscious of this fact (Bosoker and Star 2000: 3). The classifications imbricated in our lives through systems imposed by institutions are ordinarily invisible, only becoming visible when they break down or become contested.

The knowledge system utilised by Western museums has determined the ways in which cultural materials have been viewed and curated, ‘systematically organising and transforming them according to Western constructs of culture, art, history and heritage’ (Kreps 2003: 7). In the two case studies discussed in this section, the Chester Beatty Library and the Ulster Museum, it is clear that Western cultural value has been assigned to these collections. In both cases the objects displayed can be seen to embody ‘the highest level of technical skills in the areas of their craftsmanship’, which is often the marker of value for museum objects in the West (Pearce 1995: 297). This system of classification is distinct from knowledge systems utilised in the East, posing prominent issues for East Asian objects when they are considered in Western museum contexts. Accordingly, ‘each culture contains its own distinctive ways of classifying the world’ (Woodward 1997: 30). Therefore, the meanings which have been ascribed to certain objects will differ from culture to culture. Indeed, anthropologists have often studied classifications as a device for understanding the cultures of others (Bosoker and Star 2000: 3). Consequently, gaining an understanding of the value systems and classification systems through which objects are assessed is a complex task. In exploring the ways in which different values are assigned to objects ‘we are looking into the material face of civilisation, immensely complicated in its likes and dislikes and its automatic assumptions and rejections’ (Pearce 1995: 290). Our cultural lives thus enable us to make sense of the social world and to construct meanings.

Social and cultural variation is the reason why East Asian objects are interpreted differently from institution to institution, in some cases being regarded as art and in others as cultural artefact. Even though Western museum classification systems are meant to be shared, there are various ways in which the same concepts or objects can be classified. We cannot, for instance, assume that the ‘way in which we make sense of the world is shared by others’ (Batley 2014: 3). Nevertheless, museum classification systems are ‘balancing acts’, which at all times represent multiple constituencies (Bosoker and Star 2000: 69). It is thus significant to note that there always exists more than one way of classifying things, as there are usually ‘several ways of determining what is similar’ (Bouman 2005: 2). Classification can take account of include ‘the size of the object, its degree of functionality, the gestures associated with it, its form, its duration, the time of day which it appears, the material

that it transforms and the degree of exclusiveness or sociability attendant upon its use' (Baudrillard 1996: 3). What is inescapable is that each category valorises some point of view and silences another. It is therefore necessary for the museum to retain a sensitivity towards exclusion. For these reasons classification is a problematic process, in which many variances occur between diverse cultures, societies and institutions. This will next be further explored, by discussing the distinctions between objects classified as art and those as cultural artefact.

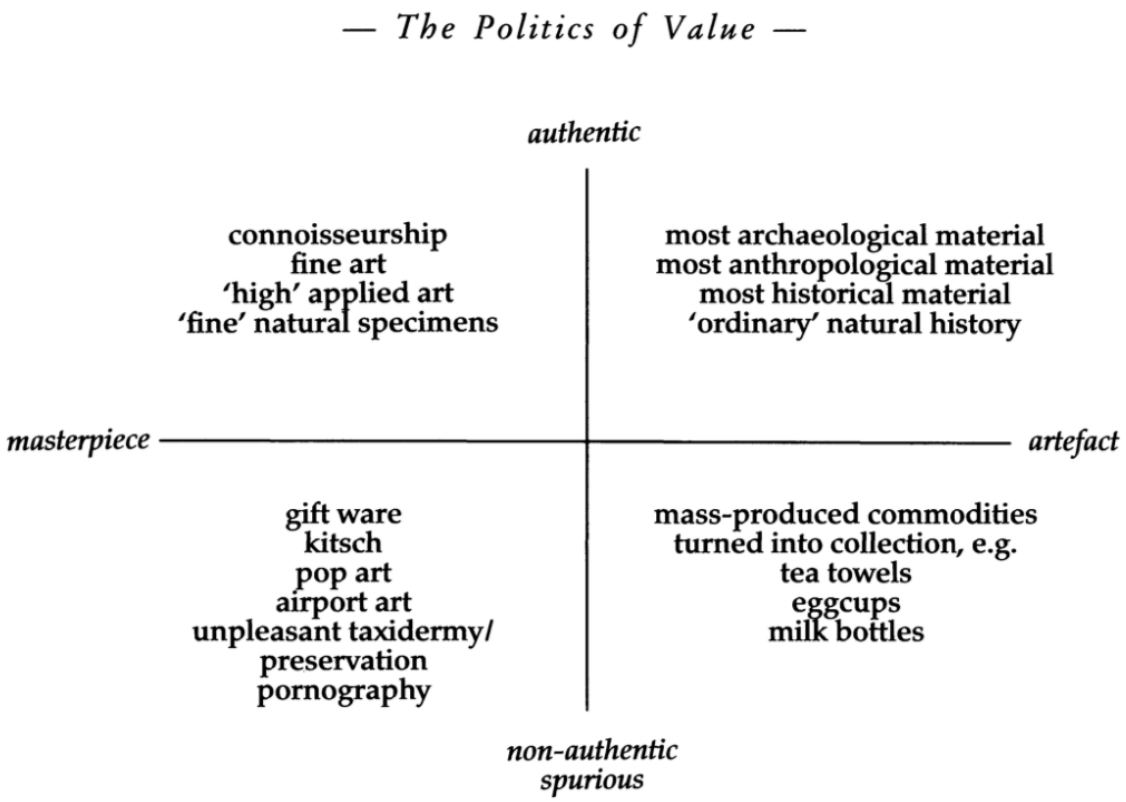
The Cultural Artefact

In this section I focus on the classification of objects into the artefact category, and how it applies to pieces from the museums I have investigated (primarily the Chester Beatty Library collection). An artefact can be defined as an object which has been created by an agent and 'we conceive of the physical object as having the qualities it does because of the intentions of the agent' (Dipert 1993: 4). Therefore, artefacts are the finished outcome of intentional activity. As a consequence, an artefact is an 'intentionally modified tool', the properties of this tool were intended by an agent to be recognised as modified for a purpose at that time or at a later date (Dipert 1993: 29). It is thus significant to note that an artefact is an object which has been invented by a person, as a method of achieving an intended endeavour.

Once an object is regarded as an artefact 'we then perform a variety of activities on it; we interpret it' (Dipert 1993: 5). This is particularly true of many objects which arrive in museum collections, as these are often interpreted and classified further (but not always, the category of art is often left open to interpretation as the following section on the aesthetic will explore). In doing so inferences are made regarding the object's functions, purposes and historical origins in individual minds or in cultures. This corresponds with Pearce's (1995) collection valuations in *The Politics of Value* (see Table 5.1 below). Pearce (1995: 291) argues that there are four main categories within which objects are given value once collected. These are 'authentic', 'non-authentic/spurious', 'masterpiece' or 'artefact'. Here the significant quadrant is that of the artefact. Artefacts are those objects which do not make the masterpiece class, they are simply items of material culture. They are objects which have been or which remain in use by a community or culture, for the achievement of some specific task. Therefore, a main difference between artefacts and masterpieces (in this study

referred to as aesthetic art objects) is the use value of artefacts. Many objects within the case studies explored for this PhD fall into this artefact quadrant. I will later argue that the Chester Beatty Library's East Asian collection and its presentation might be considered in this vein.

Table 5.1 The *Politics of Value* (Pearce 1995: 291)



Pearce has further divided objects into authentic and non-authentic. Authentic objects carry with them a sense of feeling 'genuine in the emotional sense, of sincerity, honesty and truthfulness after its own kind'. Non-authentic objects are 'the opposite of these things' (Pearce 1995: 291). Together these four quadrants structure most of our ideas of material value. In relation to museum objects the authentic side of this axis is the most relevant, since objects most commonly enter museum collections are seen to be authentic examples of something (authenticity is further discussed in Chapter Seven). It is in the division between authentic masterpieces and authentic artefacts that the separation between what is classified as art, and what is instead seen to be a cultural artefact within a museum setting, becomes most apparent. The valuation of objects against these parameters can

shift. Therefore, material often changes value moving from one classification to another, the collection of material and its accumulation into a museum setting is one of the principal mechanisms through which this occurs. So, although the museums discussed in this chapter have broadly similar collections, we see that how they are classified varies. In this section the focus will be the authentic artefact, in order to define how this classification relates to the collections explored in this PhD study.

Authentic artefacts are objects considered to be culturally genuine. Thus, holding their value in their social, cultural and historical contexts (use value). Material which is assigned to the authentic artefact quarter thus finds its place there largely because it is collectively believed to hold knowledge about the world, 'revealed by the application of correct intellectual techniques and procedures' (Pearce 1995: 297). It is through this application that the use and value of artefacts within museum collections becomes evident.

Authentic cultural artefacts on display in museums, tell a wider story about the culture from which they originated. As noted, the Chester Beatty collection is a primary example of the classification of objects as cultural artefacts. In the CBL the display of East Asian objects presents knowledge about the time and place they first originated. The text panels accompanying the objects discuss themes such as the evolution of printing in East Asia, the Kingdom of Southeast Asia, Dynastic China, Buddhism in China and Japan and Buddhism in Tibet and Mongolia (see Figure 5.1 below). The Chester Beatty collection is thus a primary example of how objects can be classified as cultural artefacts upon entering a museum collection. This collection has been classified and displayed in a way which highlights the context of the objects, including their past social and cultural uses and meanings. Presenting objects in this way largely aims to educate the museum visitor on their histories and backgrounds. Equally by presenting objects in this way their use value is emphasised, in this case regarding their historic uses as cultural artefacts of East Asia.

Figure 5.1 Display of the Chester Beatty collection (showing an example of the text panels which discuss broad topics that are placed throughout the exhibit), Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

The Chester Beatty Library extends the cultural artefact classification in operation in the museum's interpretative strategy, to the ceramic objects on display. The Chester Beatty Library displays pieces of Chinese imperial porcelain as cultural artefacts; objects containing knowledge of historic events and the wider world. Ceramic objects are commonly interpreted as art in the museum, objects holding aesthetic appeal, as will later be explored. However, the CBL has chosen not to do so, going against usual classifications in order to present these objects instead through a narrative of

their cultural history. This has enabled the museum to present a narrative of Qing China (1644-1912), which allows museum visitors, the opportunity to comprehend the contextual use value of these objects in seventeenth to twentieth-century China. Conversely the Chinese porcelain pieces displayed in the Ulster Museum (an example which will next be explored in further detail), are not utilised to portray contextual information surrounding the dynasty from which they originated. Instead these objects are displayed in a style typical of art objects; with minimal interpretative material so their aesthetic qualities can be appreciated. It will become apparent that for ceramic objects in particular, the distinctions between art and artefact classifications are complex.

The Aesthetic Art Object

In this section I focus on the classification of objects into the aesthetic category, and how this classification equally applies to many pieces from the museums I have investigated (primarily the Ulster Museum collection). Aesthetic objects are what Pearce (1995) has referred to as the masterpiece quadrant, within *The Politics of Value* model previously discussed. The authentic masterpiece section defined by Pearce represents everything which connoisseurship would recognise to be art, objects with no use (only aesthetic) value. All objects not classified and displayed as cultural artefacts in a museum setting are generally exhibited in a way which highlights their aesthetic qualities, and it is here that a prominent distinction between cultural artefacts and aesthetic art objects exists.

Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy devoted to the conceptual and theoretical investigation of art and aesthetic experience (Levinson 2003: 3). It is generally concerned with beauty or the appreciation of beauty, the term appeared and began to be widely employed following the Enlightenment in Europe, to describe the whole area of feeling as opposed to reason. It arose as an attempt to provide a ‘positive account of the role played by feelings and emotions in human thinking’ (Townsend 1997: 2). Today the term aesthetic is used for denoting the specific quality of the perception and experience of art objects. I will later argue that the Ulster Museum’s O’Neill collection of East Asian ceramic pieces and its presentation might be considered in this vein.

Aesthetic objects in the museum can be defined by three characteristics: (1) they have no use value, (2) they do not enhance knowledge and (3) they are not personal. Firstly, the aesthetic object is ‘non-practical’, therefore if you perceive something aesthetically you are perceiving it for its own sake, not for the sake of some further end or goal you can achieve by means of it (Hospers 1969: 3). Unlike cultural artefacts these objects are not appreciated for their use value. When you observe an aesthetic object, it is not for any purpose other than to perceive it aesthetically. Secondly, aesthetic objects are ‘non-cognitive’ (Hospers 1969: 3). Consequently, the purpose of observing them is not to enhance knowledge, as ‘only when you dwell on the perceptual details of the object as opposed to using it in the quest for knowledge, are you regarding the object aesthetically’ (Hospers 1969: 3). This differs entirely from how we observe cultural artefacts in a museum setting, as these objects are commonly utilised to portray knowledge of a culture or a historical event or period. Thirdly, aesthetic objects are ‘non-personal’, thus they are not to be viewed with certain kinds of personal involvement (Hospers 1969: 3). When observing a piece of art, it would therefore seem that there is a specific way of looking at it. Viewing art is a ‘specific mental phenomenon’ (Maquet 1986: 13). The object is seen in its totality, and the act of looking is only looking, there is no further aim. This contrasts entirely from the cultural artefact category, where the aim of looking is to provide knowledge surrounding the object’s history and context in the wider world.

As noted, the Ulster Museum’s O’Neill display has presented the objects in a way in which they can be appreciated for their aesthetic qualities. This includes a minimal display case: plain glass with a predominately white background. It is common for art objects to be presented in a white display space, so that nothing in the background distracts from the aesthetic appearance of the object. A minimal white display space is seen to be a modern approach to the display of art, and is used by galleries across the world. The white cube museum space did not emerge until the early twentieth century, it was originally a response to modern art, and is now the most common approach to displaying art worldwide (Tate 2018).

The Ulster Museum’s display therefore reflects the characteristics of aesthetic objects previously mentioned (see Figure 5.2 below). The museum has chosen not

to provide a large amount of background information on the collection, offering a text panel with minimal information alongside a number of small basic labels. Labels do not contextualise the objects and only provide names of objects, places of origin and dates of origin. Therefore, the history of the objects is not the focus, and they do not necessarily enhance historical knowledge through their display (characteristic 3). Instead, the objects have been presented in a way in which they can be appreciated for their appearance, meaning that they do not have a use value (characteristic 2). Also in presenting these objects aesthetically the museum has removed much of the personal connection that visitors can make to these objects, meaning that the objects are viewed in a way which is typical of art (characteristic 1).

Figure 5.2 Display of the *O'Neill Collection of Chinese Ceramics*, Ulster Museum, Belfast (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

In particular, the display case in which the O'Neill collection has been placed highlights the aesthetic attributes of these objects through the use of vibrant red plinths. These have been strategically placed beside the blue and white Ming dynasty pieces. This method of display draws the viewers' attention towards the Ming dynasty wares, which are perhaps the most valuable and highly esteemed pieces within the collection. By using the complementary colours of orange-red (the plinth) and cobalt blue (the ceramic wares), the vibrant blue colours of the pieces themselves are given the ability to truly stand out. The use of a red background is a common method of displaying artworks in museums. A red background is often used in museums and galleries to display Old Master paintings and most commonly in the display of East Asian art. This approach has been used since the nineteenth century, it emerged because of a widespread belief that red was the only possible background colour for most paintings, a result of the gold frames and the cooler colours generally used in classical art (Tate 2011). Today the use of such colours is generally seen to be an outdated approach to art display, but nevertheless it remains in common use.

This aesthetic approach to display implemented by the Ulster Museum ascribes the objects with entirely different values to the cultural artefact style of display previously discussed, as implemented by the Chester Beatty Library. Here objects are valued for their craftsmanship, beauty and aesthetic appeal. Conversely when objects are instead regarded as cultural artefacts they are valued as knowledge bearers, as objects which embody the cultures and times within which they were produced.

Challenges Encountered When Aesthetically Displaying East Asian Objects in the West

It is often problematic when East Asian objects are displayed according to Western aesthetic ideas. As within East Asian culture there exists a very different appraisal of aesthetic items, 'from the separatist Western concept of the beautiful object or art object' (Malpas 2009: 83). This style of display therefore poses the question, 'can one perceive the intended nature of an object created in another culture without becoming part of that culture oneself?' (Malpas 2009: 83). This is a challenge which museums are currently facing, prompting many museums to build a deeper connection with the communities from whom the objects within their collections

originated. For example, the Chester Beatty Library, often hosts workshops and events with community and visitor groups (see Chapter Six).

Many of the museums explored in this PhD do not have specialists in the subject area of East Asia, and do not have the time or finances to dedicate to community relations and bettering the display of their East Asian collections. While the Chester Beatty Library and the National Museum of Ireland East Asian collections do have subject specialists in their area of expertise, the Ulster Museum and the Hunt Museum do not have subject specialists in the area of East Asia. Equally for the Hunt Museum, the primary focus of this museum is medieval material, therefore the museum's overall expenditure of resources is not focussed on their East Asian collection. Similarly, as the O'Neill collection is small in comparison to the museum's other material, this collection is not the primary focus of the Ulster Museum. Previous attempts by the Ulster museum to connect with community groups through the O'Neill collection have not been successful. During personal interview, the curator of the O'Neill collection Kim Mawhinney, stated that during previous attempts to 'reach out to the Chinese community', she did not get the connection that she had hoped for (interview with Mawhinney 2019). This lack of interest from community groups is of course another factor affecting why many museums find it difficult to foster connections with communities.

Ultimately the classifications which museums impose are related to the mission and aim of the individual museum, and are also affected by the area of specialism which the majority of the museum's staff and collections belong to. The mission statements of the two case studies explored in this chapter, the Chester Beatty Library and the Ulster Museum, demonstrate this. Through the interviews conducted with the curators of the Chester Beatty Library collection, it became apparent that the museum primarily aims to present cultural understanding through its displays (see Chapter Three). The mission statement of this museum (previously noted in Chapter Four) states that it aims to 'promote a wider appreciation and understanding of the international cultural heritage embodied in the collections and to foster relations between Ireland and the peoples whose cultures are represented in the collection' (The Chester Beatty Library 2018a). I argue that this mission is reflected in the interpretation style adopted by the museum. I suggest it is because the museum

values the cultural heritage of the collections, that they focus on the artefacts as cultural pieces rather than as art. By interpreting and displaying the East Asian objects held within their collection as cultural artefacts, these objects are understood to embody knowledge of the cultures from which they originated. The museum is thus advancing a greater awareness of the international cultural heritage embodied in the collections, and of the peoples whose cultures are represented in the collection. The Chester Beatty Library utilises these objects as a tool to educate museum visitors on wider themes, cultures and topics. Accordingly, this museum also has a subject specialist in the area of East Asia, Mary Redfern, current curator of this collection. It is likely for these reasons that the museum has both the ability and the ambition to interpret the objects in regard to their cultural origins and context, therefore classifying them as cultural artefacts.

By comparison, as previously mentioned, Ulster Museum does not have a subject specialist in the area of East Asia. Also, while the mission of this museum is to 'inform and inspire understanding of the past, the present and the future of people, culture, places' (The Ulster Museum 2007), the O'Neill collection is as mentioned small, containing thirty-one objects compared to the (approximately) one million other objects in the museum's collections, and will only play a small part in achieving this wider mission. Also, the majority of the other ceramic collections held by this museum are examples of a certain art movement or art style. Therefore, by presenting the O'Neill collection of East Asian ceramics likewise as a collection of aesthetic artworks, this is more in keeping with the museum's other collections and the experience and expertise of the museum's staff. Therefore, it is probable that these factors have attributed to the classification of the O'Neill collection into the aesthetic category.

Furthermore, many of the assumptions of modern aesthetics have begun to be questioned (Townsend 1997: 165). Museums now need to acknowledge the great variety of preferences that audiences exhibit, and the differences produced by age and culture. Therefore, the assumption that a single way of approaching art that is shared by everyone no longer exists. Gender, race, ethnicity and religious belief are each factors affecting how individuals regard art objects. As a result, in today's societies 'the simple assumption of a universality of aesthetic appeal cannot be

accepted uncritically' (Townsend 1997: 165). Any museum object will be perceived differently by each museum visitor according to their own personal tastes, experiences and motivations. However, as art or aesthetic objects are typically displayed through a narrative which is open to interpretation, this makes them even more susceptible to the personal interests and motivations of the visitor.

What is considered to hold aesthetic value in the West will perhaps not be considered in the same way in East Asia. Aesthetic value is a cultural and societal trait in the mind of the individual, and in particular Western standards of beauty will completely differ from the standards of an individual who had an entirely diverse cultural upbringing. In China porcelain objects are often appreciated for their aesthetic appearance, and the craftsmanship of their manufacture (Neave-Hill 1975: 2). The significance of porcelain manufacture as a prominent aspect of East Asian history and the artistic detail encompassed within such objects is testament to this. Therefore, although in the West an argument exists for the classification of Chinese ceramics into either of the cultural artefact or aesthetic art categories. Perhaps in East Asia these classifications would not be so easily variable. As an example, a current exhibition (June 2020) which is regularly on display in the National Museum of China, titled *Ancient Chinese Porcelain Art*, very obviously presents the museum's vast collection of ceramics as aesthetic art objects. Here the porcelain objects have been displayed in a way which emphasises their aesthetic traits, such as their colours, glazes, patterns and motifs, with all the contextual information presented alongside this exhibit (website information and text panels) discussing these areas (National Museum of China 2020).

A final challenge encountered is that many objects currently categorised as aesthetic within museum collections (including the Ulster Museum's O'Neill collection) are actually utilitarian; they are pots, jugs, plates and bowls. They are instruments once used to perform simple tasks, thus their primary context lies in 'directly or indirectly maintaining bodily survival' (Maquet 1986: 60). Nevertheless, in many cases these objects additionally have a visual quality which stimulates in us an aesthetic perception of it (Maquet 1986: 60). In such cases aesthetically pleasing crafted objects also have a secondary identity as objects of use. Chinese porcelain objects in particular were once used as bowls, vases or plates but in a museum setting can

be removed entirely from this context and instead appreciated solely for their visual qualities (as seen in the Ulster Museum case study). The forms of the Chinese ceramic pieces displayed in the Ulster Museum go beyond objects simply made for use. The decorative patterns, colours and glazes with which they have been adorned also enables them to hold an aesthetic appeal. Therefore, if contemporary observers detect in these wares some formal aspects which are not needed for their efficiency as a tool, then perhaps it can be assumed that these non-instrumental forms reveal an aesthetic concern. Accordingly, 'these non-instrumental forms indicate an aesthetic interest within that society' (Maquet 1986: 60), and so appreciating them as aesthetic objects in today's society may not be entirely erroneous.

In today's society, the aesthetic attitude has become an 'important aspect of how we relate to the world' (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981: 176). Consequently, it has been traditional in our culture to assume that the category of artwork is related to the category of beautiful (McEvilley 1989: 200). Of course, in reality this is not the case as utilitarian tools can be beautiful while works of art can be repulsive. The category of the art object has therefore nothing essential to do with the category of the beautiful, as a result, the distinction between aesthetic objects and non-aesthetic objects is complex, with much cross over in the distinctions between cultural artefact and art object classifications. This is perhaps why the classifications of East Asian objects differ from institution to institution.

Final Thoughts on Theoretical Challenge One: The Impact of Classification on Display

The Ulster Museum and Chester Beatty Library displays clearly demonstrate the distinctions between displays of cultural artefacts or aesthetic art objects. For this reason, these two case studies have been used as examples in this chapter so far. However, to briefly unfold how the other two case studies explored in this PhD would be classified into either art or artefact categories, I argue that the Hunt Museum collection follows the distinctions of an aesthetic display while the National Museum of Ireland collection has the traits of a cultural artefact classification.

Aesthetic characteristics can be applied to the display practice of the Hunt Museum, as this display like the Ulster Museum display, presents minimal contextual

information and a somewhat minimalist display style, focussing visitor attention towards the aesthetic appearance of the objects. In contrast, the National Museum of Ireland display is better suited to the cultural artefact classification. Here the visitor finds objects presented alongside a large amount of contextual information. As with the Chester Beatty display, this approach presents wider narratives surrounding the cultural context, history and use value of the objects; including the use of these objects by their collector. It is important to understand the categories which each of the four collections explored in this PhD have been classified into. As in each case, the categories which collections have been assigned to determines their place in the exhibition and also influences the way in which museum visitors experience them. A museum visitor experience of a display that focuses on the aesthetic involves a 'realisation of meaning' through interaction with the visual qualities of an object (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981: 179). In such cases, the focus is on the form and quality of the artefact, with the object's value primarily in its aesthetic appeal. Whereas experiencing an object as a cultural artefact favours an experience that places the object's worth in the contextual knowledge it can be seen to embody.

Theoretical Challenge Two: The Significance of Perception

Through perception we understand and experience much more than everyday environments. Our perceptions also enable us to make sense of the art objects and cultural artefacts we encounter in the four museum environments explored in this study. Perception is a term which has a wide range of meanings, traditionally perception was not dealt with alone but always in connection with sensation (Bartley 1980: 4), perception can thus refer to the 'responses of the nervous system to external stimulation' (Bloomer 1976: 17). Consequently, what we call perception is an experience that normally results from stimulation of the senses by the environment (Wade and Swanston 2013: 2). Today theories of perception have become extensively compounded with theories of art, aesthetics and museum display (Fisher 1980: 3). In this chapter perception will be explored in relation to the most dominant sense when perceiving the four exhibitions explored in this PhD, which is sight. Although the other senses will inevitability play a role in the visit, I would argue they are much lesser. Visual perception is therefore a significant psychological process in operation during visits to each of the case study museums,

and it is through visual perception that museum learning primarily occurs in each case. It will become apparent that perception, particularly through the sense of sight, is a defining factor in how these four East Asian collections are understood and valued. However, many other factors also influence how (or if) we find meaning in the museum objects encountered, as will later be discussed in more depth.

Visitor perception of the museum displays explored in this study occurs in two stages. First, a museum visitor must decide to view the collection. In particular, the visitor interviews conducted at the Ulster Museum revealed that the majority of visitors to the museum did not stop to view the O'Neill collection. Over three hundred adults passed this collection on the day of interview, but only eleven stopped to view it. Therefore, the ability of a collection to grasp the visitor's attention is a more significant element than it perhaps first appears, determining whether the collection will be perceived at all. The second stage occurs when viewing the collection. During this stage, meanings and interpretations of the collection can then be made in the mind of the viewer, taking into account both the personal views of the individual and the interpretative strategy implemented by the museum. Again, using the Ulster Museum as an example, it is clear that visitors who viewed this collection were influenced by their own personal interests and backgrounds. On one occasion (previously noted in Chapter One) a blue and white porcelain object was selected as the visitor's favourite object on display, because it reminded them of the Delft pottery produced where they themselves grew up: the Netherlands. This interpretation is not actually presented in the collection's display narrative, as of course the objects originated from East Asia. Therefore, museum visitors play an active role in the interpretation process.

For visitors then, the interpretation process begins when the collection has first been acknowledged. However, in regard to the museum, the interpretation process begins with the information chosen to be presented (or overlooked), and continues through the visitors understanding and experience of this interpretation (Poria 2010: 221). The curator responsible for the Ulster Museum's O'Neill collection spent a great deal of time during a personal interview, discussing the lengthy design process which occurred before this collection was first displayed. This included designing the display case and writing the text panel (as explored in depth in Chapter Three). The

process of interpretation therefore occurs long before the curator constructs the display, and then is reinterpreted with each individual viewer whilst on display. This recognition is important for understanding the significant function of the visual during a museum visit in this case, as interpretation explains the past while the objects themselves are visual evidence of the past.

Berger and the Museum Environment

Theorist John Berger (1972: 7) argues that it is seeing 'which establishes our place in the surrounding world'. Here he is establishing vision as a predominant factor in our understanding of self and other, and underlining the significance of sight in our construction of meaning. Through the work of Berger many connections can be made between the construction of meaning through sight and museum display. Berger's work is predominantly used in the area of art history, as a way of understanding art perception. Making this connection to the area of museum studies therefore merges the disciplines of art history and museum studies, providing a theoretical understanding of museum display that could not be achieved without this multidisciplinary approach.

Berger (1972: 8) argues that, 'the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe'. This is relevant to learning from museum displays, as visitors will often find meaning in the objects displayed through the lens of their own interests and experiences. An example of this has previously been discussed through the Ulster Museum case study. Examples also occurred for the other museum collections explored. During the visitor interview sessions, asking visitors which object they found most memorable from the display, was often the question to draw out this personal experience of the collection. For the Hunt Museum, a visitor selected the 'puppy and kitten figurines' (interview with Hunt Museum Visitor 7, 2019) in the collection, as it reminded them of eating in Asian restaurants, something they enjoyed doing. A final example of how an object can be understood through the personality and interests of the visitor, occurred in the National Museum of Ireland visitor interviews. In this case, the visitor selected the Japanese prints and Tibetan thangka paintings as their favourite objects on display, as this individual was a graphic artist and found these pieces inspirational. Aside from these examples however, the majority of visitors interviewed gave quick responses to the questions

asked and therefore did not provide detail on why they felt this way. Accordingly, in the museum environment, when an object acquires personal meaning for the visitor it ceases to stay in the background, instead becoming an object in the individual's consciousness (Bloomer 1976: 14). This demonstrates that personal knowledge, beliefs and experiences play a role in our perception of museum displays.

Berger (1972: 7) also argues that the 'relation between what we see and what we know is never settled', this statement is likewise transferable to the museum context, as the perceptions and knowledge which museum visitors hold of objects displayed can of course change and alter over time. A visitor may feel differently towards an object when viewing it at different stages of life. However, as is significant here, this can also occur during a single museum visit. Additional knowledge surrounding the object or collection can also alter a visitor's perception of it, this can be knowledge gathered through text panels and labels during a museum visit. The written word, consequently holds 'an amazing power to affect your perceptions of meaning' (Bloomer 1976: 16). Each additional piece of knowledge (through written information) will enrich the visitor's perception of the meaning and significance of the objects, and 'a single fact can sometimes have surprising power' (Bloomer 1976: 210). A consequence of this is that through enriched perceptions, an object initially perceived to be meaningless can become appealing to the viewer. Context is the most dominant external influence on the perception of meaning.

During the visitor interviews conducted as part of this study, there are many examples of the museum visitor being influenced by what they have read on a text panel or label. The contextual information presented about the collectors of each of the collections (Albert Bender, Chester Beatty, Con O'Neill and John Hunt) made a large impact on how visitors perceived the objects in each case. For each of the four case studies, the collector was a common answer when visitors were asked who they felt was represented through the display, or what story the display told (see Chapter Three). This corresponds with the fact that the context of the collectors is a primary narrative in each of these displays, and therefore features heavily in the text included. The exception being the Chester Beatty Library, where the museum has instead focused attention on the cultural contexts of the objects. Nevertheless,

Chester Beatty remains a dominant narrative in this exhibition, due to the name of the museum and the information on Beatty presented in the museum's entrance hall.

In each case, individual visitors also picked up on additional sub-narratives told through the text panels and labels of the exhibits. An example being the Ulster Museum (as previously mentioned in Chapter Three), where one visitor discussed the narrative of the history of Chinese porcelain as the story being told through the display, stating that they 'didn't know that China had porcelain eight thousand years before the West' (interview with Ulster Museum Visitor 5, 2019), something they had read from the text panel. Nevertheless, the previous point made, that museum visitors often read collections through the context of their own interests, also makes the opposite true. This means that museum visitors can be influenced by interpretative material within a display, and as a result change their opinions or understandings because of this new information. But they can also ignore contextual information when perceiving an object or collection.

A final point which holds a strong connection to museum display practices is Berger's (1972: 16) theory that, 'today we see the art of the past as nobody saw it before, we actually perceive it in a different way'. Within their museum setting, the objects in each of the four case study collections have been presented in a manner which is entirely foreign to them. The objects have been removed from their original context and their original makers, no longer used for what they were intended, to be presented in a manner which is primarily for visual enjoyment (and learning). Most of the objects displayed in the four collections had a previous use value which has now been removed, examples being the religious objects in the Chester Beatty Library and National Museum of Ireland collections, which are now no longer used in religious practices, also the porcelain plates and bowls in the Hunt Museum and Ulster Museum collections which are now no longer used as such items. Within a museum context the objects displayed are thus presented in an environment, and viewed within a context in which they have never been before. The museum environment itself is somewhat of a modern-day conception, only resembling what it is known as today in the West from the nineteenth century onwards. Museum objects have therefore been 'detached from place and time' (Berger 1972: 9), to be presented as something for visual learning in the present. Berger argues that 'every

image embodies a way of seeing' (Berger 1972: 10). Accordingly, every museum display and exhibition can equally embody or direct a specific way of seeing. The objects are presented in a particular way alongside specific interpretative material, in the hope that visitors will learn from the experience.

Perceiving the Museum Experience

The hope for any exhibition team or curator is that the visitor will have the exhibition experience they intended; this is, however, not always the case. The four East Asian collections examined in this study are each displayed with a particular interpretive approach. As mentioned previously, a dominant narrative within the displays of each of the four collections is that of their collector. The master narrative of the National Museum of Ireland collection is Albert Bender's life, connections to Ireland and relation to museum curator Adolf Mahr. For the Hunt Museum collection, the primary display narrative is the Hunt family, in the case of the Ulster Museum the dominant display narrative is again the collector of these objects Sir Con O'Neill. Finally, the display of the Chester Beatty Library collection focuses on the cultural context of the objects. Although as the museum itself is dedicated to the life and collection of Chester Beatty, the object's collector becomes an equally prominent narrative. However, in each case there also exists a number of significant sub-narratives or lesser narratives in the interpretative approaches taken. Including, additional information surrounding the objects and their origin in East Asia. The interpretative strategies implemented within each of the displays are therefore multidimensional (as unfolded by Chapter Three); the narrative of the collector is not the only interpretation presented although it is in many cases the most dominant.

The selection of interpretations implemented for each display underlines the fact that museums are deliberately selective in what they choose to say about their collections. As identified by the French theorist Guy Debord (1967), an exhibition is both 'revealing and concealing through its presentation of a selected themes' (Debord 1967, cited by Wollen 1995: 8). Therefore, like perception, interpretation is not inclusive of every narrative or strand of history available by its very nature. In the case of museum displays, power relations often come into play here 'emphasizing stakeholder impact on presentation and interpretation' (Poria 2010: 217). For the Hunt Museum in particular the museum's docents are a primary stakeholder in the

interpretation of this collection. Museum docents run the guided tours of the collection, during which they interpret the collection for visitors. For the Ulster museum, prominent stakeholders are the three funding bodies which purchased this collection in 2002: the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Art Fund and Esme Mitchell Trust. Another prominent stakeholder for the Ulster Museum and Hunt Museum collections are the living descendants of the collectors. In each of the four case studies funding bodies, volunteers, sponsors, friends of the museum groups, trustees, partners and of course the museum audience are primary stakeholders.

The interpretative strategies selected therefore frequently reflect the institution within which the objects are displayed, working towards the museum's own objectives as well as towards those of funding bodies and other museum stakeholders. As previously mentioned in Chapter Two, by connecting each of these displays to the biographies of their collectors the museums have established a connection to Ireland; the location where these East Asian objects are currently displayed. Particularly for the national institutions explored in this study (the National Museum of Ireland and the Ulster Museum) a connection to the geographic location of the museum is significant, as both of these museums to a certain extent represent a national narrative to their visitors, including tourists to Dublin and Belfast. For this reason, the national collections are being appropriated for the narration of Western (Irish) history, rather than used primarily to show their cultural origins in East Asia. Not surprisingly museum critique repeatedly finds that the 'winner's version of history' is on display while the 'loser's account' has essentially vanished (Wollen 1995: 10). I argue this is evident in the case study museums. By allowing the story of the wealthy male collector to dominate the galleries, alternative perspectives are excluded. For instance, I suggest there is far more scope for the voices of cultural minorities living in Ireland to be reflected in these museum spaces. Consequently, before the museum visitors have made their own personally motivated understandings of the objects on display, the interpretative strategies of the display have already been shaped.

The perception of the museum visitor then, is shaped by the narratives and interpretations put in place by the institution. Also, in each of the case studies the museum setting itself generates a particular kind of perceptive response in the

viewer. From the onset, it has been established that museum objects are there for the purpose of viewing. Generally, all objects within a museum display will be deemed as worthy of meaning by the visitor. For each of the collections discussed in this study, they have also been gathered by an individual who deemed them worthy of collection. However, visitor perceptions of the significance of these objects can differ. As the mind of each individual visitor will be unique, the same object or museum display cannot stimulate precisely the same meaning for everyone who sees it (Bloomer 1976: 209). For this reason, it can be argued that art objects displayed in a museum exhibition are particularly complex. Artefacts presented as aesthetic art objects usually do not conform to 'familiar systems for processing visual data' (Bloomer 1976: 209). Often a small amount of text is given when art objects are displayed, therefore in such cases the perception of the visitor is less likely to be influenced by contextual information.

Both the Ulster Museum and Hunt Museum largely present their East Asian collections as aesthetic art objects. Both collections are presented in glass cases and thus can only be viewed from a discrete distance. Consequently, the objects can only be perceived visually and the original conditions under which the objects were produced have been completely eliminated. In such cases, aesthetic objects essentially speak for themselves. The underlying message is that these objects 'have an inherent power to communicate to you if you will only contemplate the object' (Bloomer 1976: 209). The experience of perceiving them is therefore very different to that of a text heavy, purely educational (didactic) exhibition. The concept of art is not inherent in the objects displayed. They may have once been used for everyday purposes, with aesthetics playing a lesser role in their common place value. Now these objects are deemed particularly significant because of their aesthetic value. Art when defined or presented as such, represents a particular way of perceiving; a process of projecting aesthetic meaning onto objects (Bloomer 1976: 210).

In their current environment, these objects have both an original context, the conditions under which they were produced, and also a viewing context, under which they are now seen. As is the case with the East Asian collections discussed, the art of other cultures, in this case East Asian art objects within a Western context holds

this dual context, the living context in which the object was made and used, and the vastly different context in which it is viewed today. In this case it is the culturally (through Western conventions) constructed viewing context, rather than the original nature of the object itself which leads people to perceive it as aesthetically pleasing (art). Humans learn their perceptions from other individuals (Bloomer 1976: 16). Therefore, culture is the most prominent non-biological or social influence on human perception. Without sufficient knowledge of non-Western cultural conditions the objects are viewed primarily 'only in terms of Western values' (Bloomer 1976: 211). This often leads to multiple, divergent conclusions or interpretations regarding the meaning and significance of the object. In the case of the Ulster Museum and Hunt Museum collections, the interpretative focus given to the aesthetic appearance of the ceramic objects on display silences other aspects of their context; including the East Asian societies and cultures they can be seen to represent.

Perception is therefore inseparable from culture and society. Although Western models of perception continually undergo modification, what is more prominent is the perceptual differences among divergent cultures. Often a museum visitor will respond quicker and more confidently to objects from ones' own culture, which are in some ways familiar. This was seen in the visitor interviews conducted, through the connections visitors made between objects displayed and things which they already know. For example, the visitor to the Ulster Museum display previously discussed, who made a connection to the blue and white Ming porcelain pieces displayed and the delftware of their hometown in the Netherlands. Another visitor to the Ulster Museum selected a Song period bowl as their favourite, because they liked its yellow colour, again attaching themselves to what is familiar about the object, which in this case was their favourite colour. A visitor to the Hunt Museum selected the Qing dynasty porcelain pugs within the collection as the objects which resonated with them most, because they had a pet dog. A second visitor to the Hunt Museum selected a blue and white Ming dynasty porcelain bowl, as in this case it reminded them of Irish delftware and the visitor was personally interested in Dublin craft makers. As a final example, a visitor to the National Museum of Ireland (previously mentioned) selected the Japanese prints and Tibetan thangka paintings on display as their favourite, because they themselves were a graphic artist; again, using something familiar to them to understand the object on display. Unfortunately, the

visitor interviews conducted at the Chester Beatty Library did not collect any information in this area. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the interviews conducted at this site had additional questions added by the museum, and for this reason were not as successful. Regardless, enough data was collected at the other sites to show that museum visitors frequently use examples of familiar objects or things to better understand less familiar objects of another culture. It can also be argued that the museum visitors selected these objects as ones which stood out to them the most because they responded quicker to the thing which was most familiar.

Final Thoughts on Theoretical Challenge Two: The Consequence of Perception

The discussion of visual perception highlights the vast amount of object meanings that can be ascribed, with only a small selection then chosen by the museum through the interpretative strategies put in place. The idea that artefacts have a complex presence which is subject to multiple interpretations has important implications for the way museums present themselves. Accordingly, the idea that objects are not neutral but complex and subject to changing meanings should compel museums to adjust their 'display activities' (Smith 1989: 6; Choi 2016). There has been increasing dissatisfaction with conventional museological interpretative methods that present one strand of a story as a dominant narrative. In the four collections explored in this study this dominant strand of the story is the biography and life of the collectors. Critics are exposing that in such cases, museum interpretation is often used to sustain the power of the 'dominant hegemonic groups in society' (Poria 2010: 221). In this case these East Asian collections have been appropriated to represent the narrative of their Western collectors, therefore largely overlooking many of the other strands of history, culture and identity which these objects represent. This results in pressures being brought to bear upon museum curators to adopt more inclusive practices (Simpson 2001: 2). I have found evidence of such practices in the museums discussed in this chapter and would argue there are methods the museums could adopt to accomplish more inclusive practices that acknowledge the multitude of potential narratives that can be told in the museum space (see Chapter Eight).

Chapter Five Conclusion

The East Asian collections explored in this study have each been displayed as belonging to one of two categories: the aesthetic art object or the cultural artefact. Among the countless artefacts surrounding us some were made or selected to be looked at, these are known as art objects. Other artefacts, though made and used in contexts other than art, have an equally strong visual appeal. The latter together with the former are what I have termed aesthetic art objects, their forms can be appreciated for their visual qualities and can sustain visual contemplation, setting them apart from other tangible objects. The Ulster Museum's O'Neill collection is an example of how objects can be interpreted as aesthetic within a museum setting. The *O'Neill Collection of Chinese Ceramics* presents objects which once had a use value, as objects which are now presented in such a way that they can now be appreciated by the museum visitor for their aesthetic qualities. The collections explored in this study also present examples of objects interpreted as cultural artefact. Within a museum setting, cultural artefacts are interpreted as an embodiment or symbol of their cultural origins or a point in history. The Chester Beatty Library display presents this style of interpretation, as the East Asian objects displayed within this museum are used to present a narrative of their cultural origins in East Asia. However, Chapter Five has also shown that similar objects can fall into a completely different category depending on the museum classifying and interpreting them. How the collections have been interpreted therefore largely depends on the museum's mission and the specialism of the museum's staff, as much as it depends on the attributes of the objects themselves.

A second finding of Chapter Five, is that perception (predominantly visual perception) also dramatically affects museum display practices. This determines how the East Asian collections explored in this study will be seen and understood, by both museum curators and the museum audience. Much current research on perception is focussed on the area of art history (Berger 1972; Bartley 1980; Fisher 1980; Mitchell 1994), as a concept, visual perception is rarely discussed in regard to the museum environment. However, this chapter has found that theories of visual perception draw strong parallels to how objects are observed and understood within the museum. By applying the work of art critic Berger (1972) to perception within the

museum, this chapter has taken a multidisciplinary approach, combining the areas of museum studies and art history in order to better understand the narration of East Asian collections in Ireland. It was found that in relation to the museum visitor, object meanings are often made through the lens of their own interests and experiences. Consequently, the museum visitor will often not experience the museum collection or display as the curator intended. For the case studies explored in this study the narrative of the collector was predominantly felt by the museum audience regardless of the interpretative approach taken. Equally, the visitor interviews conducted exposed that visitors select objects in displays as a result of personal interests and experiences. However, the text panels and labels included within displays also impacted what visitors perceived in some cases. The perception of the museum visitor then, is shaped by the narratives and interpretations put in place by the institution as well as by personal experience. For the museum, the interpretative strategies selected frequently reflect the institution, working towards the museum's own objectives as well as towards those of funding bodies and other museum stakeholders.

Chapter Six

Functions of Display: Educational and Community Approaches

This chapter explores public engagement programming using the East Asian collections in the four museums that are the focus of this research. I begin by exploring the educational strategies surrounding the Hunt collection displayed in the Hunt Museum (Limerick) and the O'Neill collection displayed in the Ulster Museum (Belfast). Later, in part two, I follow this with discussion of the Chester Beatty collection in the Chester Beatty Library (Dublin) and the Bender collection in the National Museum of Ireland (Dublin) as they relate to community engagement initiatives. In doing so the two prominent functions of East Asian collections in Ireland will have been underlined. The first of these functions is the utilisation of a museum collection as an educational resource. The second is the use of collections and displays as resources for community engagement programmes. Although these functions can be recognised in the four case studies explored in this PhD, they are not confined to them and are widely applicable to contemporary museum practice, making them both extremely topical discussion points, which feature extensively within the surrounding area of museum studies research. The primary issues to arise from the exploration of these two areas will be the significance of visitors in processes of meaning-making which lead to educational engagement, the use of educational strategies to create value in collections and the promotion of tolerance between communities through community engagement initiatives. This final point is particularly relevant to the current Western museum, as issues of diversity and multiculturalism feature prominently in Western public discourse.

In part one (Function One) on educational strategies, I argue that the Ulster Museum's O'Neill display holds many connections to the British studio pottery display which it is situated beside. Therefore, the main interpretation strategy utilised by the museum employs the strategic placement of the objects and visitors' own readings of this. These findings will then be compared to a very different approach taken by the Hunt Museum, with its more diverse educational approach. In this case it becomes apparent that the educational strategies in place also largely depend on the visitor's personal interpretation of this collection, and in this case in response to guided tours.

In part two (Function Two) on community engagement initiatives, I argue that the Chester Beatty Library stands out as an institution which places a great emphasis on engagement with multi-cultural communities through its collections. The Chester Beatty Library has proven itself to be a frontrunner in this area. The chapter written by CBL Outreach Officer Jenny Siung, in the NEMO publication *Museums as places for intercultural dialogue: selected practices from Europe* (2009), demonstrates that the museum was an early front-runner in community engagement. Since 2000 the CBL has been a 'key initiator in developing exploratory cultural projects with existing and new communities' (Siung 2009: 19). Through such cultural projects the museum places emphasis on intercultural dialogue, by using collections as storytelling devices. In doing so the museum hopes to encourage thoughtful engagement between one or more persons from different groups through a variety of activities, enabling 'a deeper and better understanding of each other and their cultures' (Siung 2009: 19). The museum therefore plays a significant role in addressing intercultural dialogue in Ireland through the initiatives put in place, as will later be unfolded through an exploration of the current programmes and initiatives relating to the museum's East Asian collection.

Community engagement initiatives, although perhaps on a smaller scale, are also being integrated into the day to day programmes of the National Museum of Ireland. Both the NMI and the CBL demonstrate that they can undertake the established museum roles of collecting, conservation and display of objects alongside new demands around promoting understanding between communities within their work. The second section of this chapter will focus on the community engagement activities undertaken by these two institutions in regard to their displays of East Asian art and artefacts.

Function One: Museums, Engagement and Learning

Museums can be defined as places where individuals of all ages can 'seek and find meaning and connection' (Falk and Dierking 2000: 2). Learning is a critical museum function which has been recognised for as long as there have been public museums. However, the educational functioning of the museum has altered since its inception as a space for learning. Over the last twenty years, the museum has altered from an 'inward-looking, curator-driven and collections focussed' institution to one which is

‘outward-facing’ and ‘audience-focussed’ (Black 2012: 75). Museum learning is now widely recognised as both a ‘process’ and an ‘outcome’ (Black 2012: 75). The process being how and what visitors learn within the museum environment, and the outcome being the benefits of such learning. By the end of the twentieth century the philosophy of life-long learning through museum practices had well been established, with the recognition that education does not end with formal schooling. Since this period, museum education theories have been applied alongside the basic principles of life-long learning, recognising that learning continues throughout all stages of life (Hooper-Greenhill 1991: 5).

The theories surrounding learning itself have also altered over time, coinciding with the changing attitudes towards museum education. The contemporary Western museum must respond to the demands of visitors who are no longer willing to be ‘passive recipients of received wisdom’ but instead require a greater say in ‘what they are allowed to know’ (Black 2012: 80). Most initial learning theories derived from laboratory work and neglected the significant roles which personal, social and physical contexts play in learning. This parallels with the nineteenth-century educational role of the museum; when collections through their very existence were seen to be educational. It was believed that by viewing well-executed exhibitions museum visitors would ‘learn what the project team intended’ (Falk and Dierking 2000: 7). However, recent research (Falk and Dierking 1992, 2000) has suggested that this learning model is flawed, finding that prior knowledge, the museum experience itself and the role of subsequent experiences are equally important factors to the overall museum learning encounter (Falk and Dierking 2000: 7). Today, current research has yet to devise a consistent description of what learning is and how it functions, corresponding with the fact that educational practices are usually particularised to each institution. Thus, all learning appears to be inextricably bound to the environment in which it occurs (Falk and Dierking 2000: 65). Subsequently the educational position of each museum will be unique, and no two museums will provide the same educational service.

Within current museum practices, emphasis is placed on the active use of collections, and on making available as many different forms of learning possible with available resources (Hooper-Greenhill 1991: 2). Therefore, museum education

no longer focuses on the interpretation of objects, but also necessitates a consciousness surrounding the meanings constructed by both museums and their visitors (Roberts 1997: 145). It is through direct engagement with museum objects that visitors can acquire impactful learning experiences (Black 2012: 85). This corresponds with the educational strategies currently utilised within the display of the Hunt and O'Neill collections. As in each case scope has been given to allow visitors to construct their own understandings of the objects on display. Accordingly, museum education is now understood as an active engagement or dialogue between the learner and the environment. Many Western museums, not only the Ulster Museum and Hunt Museum, currently employ teaching methods which largely focus on the needs and interests of the museum visitor (Hooper-Greenhill 1991: 3).

The Dominance of the Western Art History Narrative in the Display of East Asian Ceramics at the Ulster Museum

The O'Neill collection at the Ulster Museum is an important educational resource for the museum, focussing on A-Level (Art and History of Art) and third level audiences. The collection is described by the museum as a 'small but important element of the pottery and porcelain collection that puts the European pieces into context' (Mawhinney 2002: 1). This approach makes a connection between this collection of Chinese ceramics and later Western wares. As discussed in Chapter Two, the East Asian collection was originally loaned to the museum by Sir Con Douglas Walter O'Neill (1911-1988) in 1960 (Mawhinney 2002: 1). The then museum director chose thirty-one diverse pieces from O'Neill's collection, which display a broad history of Chinese ceramics. Initially by selecting a range of diverse objects it was hoped that this collection would act as a 'teaching resource', allowing the museum to almost fully document the early history of Chinese ceramics (Mawhinney 2002: 1). Although the educational strategies interpreting this collection have undoubtedly altered during its time in the Ulster Museum, it is indisputable that this collection has continuously played a role in the museum's educational goals.

Specifically, the strategic placement of the objects within the display emphasise its educational role. The O'Neill collection's early Chinese ceramic wares are positioned directly opposite a display case of British studio pottery by Bernard Leach and others

(see Figures 6.1 and 6.2 below). As a consequence, this signifies the connections and influences that can be found between studio pottery, Bernard Leach and early Chinese ceramics. The connections rendered not only in theory present the intermingled relationship between Chinese ceramics and British ceramics, but also the social context between East Asia and the West during this time. In the first year of the Ulster University's *BA Hons Contemporary Applied Arts (CAA)* ceramics degree, students are taken to the museum for a day to 'draw and learn' from these collections (interview with Mawhinney 2019). Thus, the research-led learning outcomes of this course correspond with the educational role of the Ulster Museum collection, as it provides students with the ability to make visual connections and research the links between these two ceramic styles further. A closer look at the Ulster Museum's studio pottery collection can be seen in Figure 6.3.

Figure 6.1 Image shows the display case containing the O'Neill collection placed directly beside a display case containing the Ulster Museum's studio pottery collection, Ulster Museum, Belfast (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Figure 6.2 The display case containing the O'Neill collection directly opposite the display case containing the studio pottery collection, Ulster Museum, Belfast (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Figure 6.3 The Ulster Museum's collection of studio pottery, Ulster Museum, Belfast (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

A number of object examples will next be briefly highlighted, comparing and contrasting them to the studio pottery objects which they hold a deep connection to. While a detailed account of the history of the objects could have been proffered, this has not been included in this study. The aim of the object discussion is to give necessary background information as a means of advancing an understanding of

how they are currently used as an educational resource. This chapter therefore aims to dissect the educational narratives incorporated within the O'Neill display.

The Display as an Insight into British Studio Pottery History

A core aspect of any art history or contemporary applied arts programme is ceramics history, and the Ulster Museum display is set up as an ideal means for a student of degree programmes in ceramics to get an insight into that. As previously mentioned, the Ulster Museum uses this collection primarily as a learning device for undergraduate students and works closely with the *Applied Art Ceramics* course at Ulster University. A visit to the museum and these collections in particular is made each academic year. The display of these collections therefore fits into the university's teaching programme, allowing students to make connections between various styles of ceramics they have been learning about first hand. In this case, it becomes apparent that the museum holds a particular learner group in mind; that of the art (ceramics) student. Generally, museums are educational resources of great importance for pupils at all levels of study and provide an applied experience rather than text based classroom work (Talboys 2010: 24). Museums, therefore, are beneficial environments for meaningful learning, because they offer multi-sensory experiences (Falk and Dierking 1992: 114). Consequently, presenting messages through tangible objects is a significant device for meaning-making and promoting understanding (Chatterjee 2010).

In this section I discuss the links made in the display, between the East Asian collection that is centuries old and the twentieth-century British studio pottery. In telling the story of British studio pottery, the Ulster Museum focusses on the life and work of Bernard Leach (1887-1979), as he is seen to be the leader of this movement. Through Leach the studio pottery movement was not only a visual art movement but also a movement of thought. Leach's writing was instrumental in placing ideas and images of a 'meeting of East and West' at the movement's heart (Waal 2006: 6). Like many potters since, Leach spent some time developing his craft in Japan, culminating in him writing a booklet entitled *An English Artist in Japan* (Jones 2007: 78). In this publication Leach discusses how he has seen a 'vision of the marriage of East and West' and that through this 'marriage' the 'first complete round human society' could be established (Jones 2007: 78). During the time in

which Leach was writing this, the American and French revolutions and the political reforms in Britain had in the previous century drastically changed the Western view of China, thus perhaps making it feasible that the continents would remain harmonious (Ch'en 1979: 38). Similarly, the 'expansion of European and American commercial involvement in East Asia expanded a more detailed and accurate knowledge of China in the West' (Ch'en 1979: 39). It is this political and commercial context which is therefore reflected through the studio pottery movement, as above all else studio pottery largely reflects the time in which it was made.

It is also significant to note that at this time Japanese and Chinese styles largely influenced many styles of Western art, not only studio pottery. European taste for all things Chinese and Japanese was at its height during Bernard Leach's lifetime (Lambourne 2005: 6). This influence on Western art began in the mid-seventeenth century after European traders started to import large quantities of Chinese and Japanese porcelain (Yamada 1976: 12). However, today the connections found between East Asia and the West through studio pottery styles are perhaps not as promoted or evident. The studio pottery made by Leach has become entwined with that of his followers. Leach's style has therefore become a code for 'muddy colours, unarticulated forms and Oriental brushwork' (Waal 2006: 72). In general, British studio pottery can be perceived as an independent art form, therefore its connections to East Asia have perhaps been 'overlooked in recent years' (Jones 2007: 8).

By exploring select objects from the O'Neill collection, the connections between East Asian ceramic wares and studio pottery can be found. British studio pottery can essentially be seen as work produced on a small scale by a single person or a small group of people, contrasting starkly to the mass production of Chinese ceramic wares from the Song dynasty (960-1279 AD) to the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). The 'individual hand-made nature' of the wares and a 'consciously non-industrial stance' were defining features of the work (Watson 1990: 12). Primarily the aim was to produce crafts not tainted by factory industrialisation. This contrasts starkly with ceramic production methods in China. An industrialised system of production emerged in China during the Song dynasty. Because of this system, art has been produced in huge quantities throughout Chinese history, and much of what we identify to be Chinese art today was produced in factories. Mass production has

been feasible because ‘the Chinese devised production systems to assemble objects from standardized parts’ (Ledderose 2000: 1). In Chinese society, modular production largely contributed to ‘forging and maintaining structures of an organised society’ (Ledderose 2000: 5), due to the large numbers of participants needed for factory work, and the systems of hierarchy present within the workforce. On the consumer side an industrialised system of production allowed large quantities of porcelain and ceramic goods to saturate both the East Asian and Western market. Similarly, the availability of mass amounts of ‘luxury goods’ such as ceramic and porcelain wares improved the quality of life for many and ‘contributed to their feeling of privilege’ (Ledderose 2000: 89).

The O’Neill collection contains a Ting Yao dish (see Figure 6.4 below), which originated from this Song period of porcelain mass production. Commonly known as the ‘classical age of Chinese culture’ (Neave-Hill 1975: 58), the Song period has also been considered as a classical age of Chinese ceramics. The Ting Yao dish possesses the plainness and purity which is considered to be distinctive of classical (early) Chinese ceramics, and greatly inspired studio pottery makers both physically and philosophically. Both early Chinese ceramic pieces and studio pottery objects thus radiate a perceived simplicity. This was because studio pottery generally took inspiration from simply shaped Chinese earthenwares and stonewares, with natural coloured glazes (Watson 1990: 18). Another central theme within studio pottery was the clash between the seemingly unstoppable dynamics of the West, and the ‘quieter more solidly established and enduring values of the East’ (Jones 2007: 78). However, Chinese ceramic and Western studio pottery objects have a different finish. Song ceramics are often finished to perfection, a result of the mechanical processes which created them. In contrast to this, studio pottery was an experimental method of production which celebrated flaws and imperfections (Jones 2007: 12).

A later Liao period earthenware vase in the O’Neill display holds the greatest aesthetic connections to many of the studio pottery objects. One of the most distinctive shapes associated with the Liao dynasty (907-1125 AD) is the long-necked vase. This shape was then later duplicated on a large scale by the studio potters. The Liao period vase also holds connections to Song dish previously

discussed, as the decoration of Liao ceramics wares derives from Song wares (Neave-Hill 1975: 52). However, the connections which exist between early Chinese ceramics and studio pottery are not solely aesthetic, as previously discussed, philosophical and theoretical connections also exist. Figure 6.5 below depicts the O'Neill collection Liao earthenware vase, while Figure 6.6 depicts a piece of studio pottery also displayed by the Ulster Museum which holds evident similarities to the former.

Figure 6.4 Song period Ting Yao dish, O'Neill Collection, Ulster Museum, Belfast (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Figure 6.5 Liao period earthenware vase, O'Neill Collection, Ulster Museum, Belfast (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Figure 6.6 Item (attributed to Lucie Rie) within the studio pottery collection which has a direct resemblance to the Liao period Earthenware vase previously discussed; representing the connection found between these two styles, Ulster Museum, Belfast (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

The Learning Focus of The O'Neill Collection

Many connections exist between the O'Neill collection's early Chinese ceramic pieces and examples of Bernard Leach's (studio pottery) works that go beyond the aesthetic. These links also symbolise the prevailing late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Western understandings of East Asia (Leach in fact born in 1887), and the admiration many Western artists felt towards early Chinese ceramics at this time. By displaying these collections side-by-side the Ulster Museum makes these links and associations by implication. During interview, when asked to discuss the intended narratives of the O'Neill display, the collections current curator Kim Mawhinney made this display strategy evident. Stating the connections which can be made by the visitor between the O'Neill collection and the studio pottery collection 'is a really important part of the gallery display' (interview with Mawhinney 2019). For the museum, it is significant that the links made between these two collections bridge the gap between 'the old to the new' (interview with Mawhinney 2019). Didactic components within a museum exhibition are commonly seen in the form of labels and text panels, that describe what is to be learned from the exhibition. However, in this case the museum has not included any text obviously stating the connections which can be found between these two collections, instead utilising a much more instinctive approach to learning.

Of the two text panels given within these displays (one within each display case), one specifies the background of the O'Neill collection and its collector Sir Con O'Neill, the other identifies a broad history of studio pottery and Bernard Leach's life without going into too much detail. The labels also provided (one for each object displayed) state what the object is, when it was made and (if relevant) who created it. Therefore, the textual information given provides basic context to the two collections, allowing any additional learning to occur only in the minds of museum visitors. Regardless of whether visitors have read the text panels provided or not, the educational strategies put in place by the Ulster Museum theoretically mean that there is still potential for individuals to learn from these exhibits by making connections between them.

The approach to learning put in place by the Ulster Museum can be compared to constructivist and discovery learning tactics. Discovery education approaches

present learning as an active process and allows exploration by ‘going back and forth amongst exhibit components’ (Hein 1998: 30), as can be argued happens in this Ulster Museum exhibit. Perhaps more fitting again to this exhibit is a constructivist learning approach. The theory of constructivism is based on the premise that ‘learning is an active process’, focussed on the ‘generation of outcomes’ (Black 2012: 80). This utilises two separate components: (1) a recognition that in order to learn, the active participation of the learner is required; and, (2) that the conclusions reached by the learner are not validated by truth, but whether they make sense within the ‘constructed reality of the learner’ (Hein 1998: 34). As the Ulster Museum exhibit does not formally present the connections which can be found between early Chinese wares and studio pottery, learning occurs in a constructed sense; providing understanding only within the constructed reality of the viewer.

Museum displays are at the heart of decisions regarding artefact choice and interpretation. These decisions parallel fundamental notions about what it means to educate, what it means to know, and what it means to hold the authority to represent knowledge (Roberts 1997: 8). The very act of generating an exhibit is thus subject to the same considerations and limitations that applies to the construction of knowledge. Messages are expressed about objects, collections and their context but also about the museum itself. The concept of museum learning has elevated experience to a more important place in the effort to educate (Hein 1998: 4). Therefore, the Ulster Museum’s collection has become central within school and university programmes since they can offer physical interaction with objects and the written word.

What is less certain however, are the effects this display approach will have on museum visitors who do not possess prior knowledge of ceramic art history or making (or who are not currently studying this area). The process of attributing meaning to objects in museums generally depends on prior knowledge and the amount a visitor can learn often depends on this (Hooper-Greenhill 1994b: 46). Constructivist learning theory confirms that the constructed nature of meaning depends on prior knowledge, beliefs and values. Therefore we ‘see according to what we know’ and make meaning ‘according to what we perceive’ (Hooper-Greenhill 1994b: 47). When viewing exhibitions, experiences and knowledge not only

influence what an individual is interested in seeing but also their capacity to perceive it. Regardless of intelligence or learning style, the issue of learning ultimately rests on perception and attention. Museum learning requires ‘active perception, attention and encoding’, which will be a unique process for each individual (Falk and Dierking 1992: 106).

In an interview for this research, the curator described the display as primarily ‘positioned for its aesthetic appeal’ (interview with Mawhinney 2019). Thus, the displays of the Chinese collection and the British studio pottery collection are heavily reliant on the aesthetic qualities of the objects. By presenting the objects in this way the museum cannot rely on theoretical knowledge or the prior knowledge of visitors. Their theoretical context and history become a secondary element of the overall display. The interview held with the current curator of this collection revealed that the museum hopes to present the visual resemblance between the objects, anticipating that visitors will observe the similarities in colour and design which can be found between the studio pottery and Chinese wares. The Ulster Museum has therefore intended for the visitor to perceive the ‘actual ceramics’, thus that ‘the text is very secondary’ (interview with Mawhinney 2019). By presenting the objects in this way the museum is serving a specialist community of users (students and researchers) who come with an understanding of the historical context. Little is done to cater for those visitors without an art history or ceramics background.

The aesthetic portrayal of museum objects can potentially be problematic. A focus on the visual characteristics can mean that other visitors ‘fail to appreciate the full richness and depth of a topic’ and therefore may leave with a ‘false image’ of the collection or an ‘incomplete’ view of the past (Monti and Keene 2013: 1). In this case the influence of Chinese ceramics on the West may be lost. It can be presumed that only the intended audience (art students) will be able to fully learn from this display, and possess the necessary understanding to make the links between objects. Therefore, it is very unlikely that the majority of visitors to the Ulster Museum will hold the necessary expert knowledge on studio pottery and early Chinese ceramics to construct associations and connections beyond the visual. The visitor interviews conducted at this site largely confirmed this, as will be later discussed.

Regardless, the interpretative strategies currently in place in the display of the Ulster Museum's O'Neill collection and studio pottery collection, certainty permit some opportunity for museum visitors to find their own meanings and connections between the objects. Open interpretative strategies play on the human need to find meaning and pattern and to make sense of experience. This approach to interpretation also corresponds with current best practice techniques in museums, as a 'good exhibition design draws visitors in and compels them to investigate the topic at hand' (Falk and Dierking 2000: 133). However new learning is always 'constructed from a base of prior knowledge' (Falk and Dierking 2000: 32). Therefore, it needs to be taken into account that many outside factors also affect the learning process, including prior knowledge, personal context and sociocultural context, consequently, regardless of the fact that the Ulster Museum has intended for unspoken visual, aesthetic and contextual connections to be made between the two collections displayed side by side, the museum visitor my just as easily overlook these links.

Visitor Interviews and Audience Engagement at the Ulster Museum

The interviews carried out with museum visitors at the Ulster Museum, gave further insight into how visitors actually interact with the narratives and educational strategies put in place. Although visitor interviews have been previously dissected in Chapter Three, here they will be discussed in relation to what visitors perceived or learnt from the display.

I interviewed eleven visitors at the Ulster Museum, and a small minority of these individuals noted the visual connections which can be found between the O'Neill collection and the studio pottery collection which it has been strategically placed beside. The two visitors who made connections between the displays, did so primarily on an aesthetic level (therefore without theoretical context). Conversely, one visitor stated that there was no correlation between the O'Neill display and the museum's other displays, expressing that the O'Neill display was 'disjointed with other objects on display' and that there was no 'connection between everything' (interview with Ulster Museum Visitor 10, 2019). Consequently, it is uncertain how effectively the educational strategies put in place by the Ulster Museum operate, further visitor interviews on a much larger scale than this project allowed scope for would be necessary in order to conclusively answer this question. However, it is

appropriate that the museum allowed interpretative space for visitors to understand objects through the lens of their own personal taste, opinions and experiences, another primary finding of the interviews, was that personal taste largely motivated the selection or choice of objects which visitors engaged with and selected as their favourite from the display (see Chapters Three and Five).

With minimal contextual information and an aesthetic approach taken to presenting the objects, individuals were left to select which objects they regarded as most visually compelling. A wide variety of objects were therefore selected by visitors. Examples of why individuals selected favourite objects from the display include: because they liked the colour, or because the shape and colour reminded them of something from home. Other visitors chose objects because they had never previously seen anything like the object selected, because they felt drawn to it, because the object reminded them of an English pottery style they admire or because the object reminded them of a contemporary design they appreciate. Therefore, object engagement was entirely personally motivated. The minimal amount of interpretative material included within the O'Neill display thus did not hinder visitors in engaging with objects on a personal level and viewing was not directed or mediated.

As previously mentioned the Ulster Museum has tailored this display most prominently for use by students, although it is also thought that the display is likewise accessible to 'repeat visitors', 'day-to-day visitors' and 'tourists' (interview with Mawhinney 2019). It seems that the museum's target audience corresponds with visitor opinions. The visitors who were interviewed seemed divided between five recurring audience categories or demographics; art students or people who enjoy art, the older generation, someone with a specialist interest, tourists and fellow visitors. Therefore, the Ulster Museum was accurate in supposing that this display would be perhaps most suitable for students, but may also appeal to a wide variety of other audience groups. Although what they did not account for is that fact that a large proportion of the overall individuals interviewed believed this display was actually best suited to the older generation. Interestingly, this response has occurred throughout all of the visitor interviews conducted. Perhaps the historical collectors represented in the museum displays, not only represent the objects they each

accumulated, but also a fading trend for Asian ceramic/artefact collecting and the dwindling taste for East Asian objects within Western domestic settings.

Potential for Dialogic Learning Approaches at the Hunt Museum and Consequences for Narrative

In 2019 the Hunt Museum published its new strategic plan which put 'changing lives with culture, creativity and learning' at the core of what the museum does (The Hunt Museum 2019). A vital museum function underlined in this strategic plan is to provide and share knowledge. The museum achieves this by using its collections 'to maximise their cultural and educational potential' (The Hunt Museum 2019). Although the museum sees visitor transformation as key, this is not evident in the displays which have remained largely unchanged for years. Within the museum's East Asian display few labels and text panels have been used. Instead, visitor learning predominantly occurs through the interaction between museum visitors and tour guides (museum docents), who are utilised as the primary educational method in the museum. The Hunt Museum places a great deal of significance on the tours held by museum docents, incorporating this as a primary educational strategy in the museum. Similar to the Ulster Museum's educational model previously discussed, the educational strategy put in place by the Hunt Museum is equally an example of constructivist or discovery learning. In this case, object learning focusses on personal experience and individual knowledge to shape the learning experience.

The museum primarily communicates knowledge and information through guided tours and educational outreach programmes, both delivered by docents. The tours aim to achieve an intimate atmosphere, in an interview the museum's Head of Collections noted that the docents 'keep the numbers very small' (interview with O'Nolan 2019). Each tour is specifically adapted to suit the visitors in terms of both age and/or interests. As revealed during an interview with a museum docent (Margaret Walsh), throughout the tours docents continually ask people 'if they know anything about the collection' (interview with Walsh 2019). This demonstrates the museum's dialogic approach to learning. In a positive light, the relaxed interpretative strategies seen in this case are one way that museums can play a more active role in helping visitors construct their own narratives. By frequently asking museum

visitors what they know about the objects or collection, the museum promotes visitor input and engagement. The interpretations presented by the museum therefore do not exclude alternate versions (conflicting voices) allowing for argument, complexity and multiple perspectives. Providing a two-way approach to education takes into account both the expert knowledge retained by the museum and also the prior knowledge of individual visitors. The Hunt Museum is the only institution to implement such a strategy for approaching East Asian collections in Ireland, and thus is to some extent developing and revolutionising this area of practice. Today the task of museum education is no longer focused on the interpretation of objects, and accepts the learner (the museum visitor) as an active participant in the process (Black 2012: 80). Consequently, the approach taken by the Hunt Museum may be an innovative method of achieving this.

Knowledge is also passed between existing docents and new members through a twice-yearly recruitment programme. During a personal interview, another of the museum's docent team (Irene Macken), revealed that this enables 'the people who have been here for a while the ability pass on what they have learnt and maybe bits of research they have done, and to talk about it' (interview with Macken 2019). A Friends of the museum group also meets every month for lectures inspired by the collection, where docents will often present their own research on the objects. The accumulation and dissemination of knowledge thus happens throughout many levels within the Hunt museum, and is not limited to communication between the museum and the visitor.

Similar to the Ulster Museum, the needs of specific educational groups also play a large role in the Hunt Museum's overall educational programming, in this case working with both school groups as well as university students. Macken described to me that the museum is 'very connected with the community at large', through school programmes (interview with Macken 2019). Walsh added, the Hunt Museum is 'very much used by the community' playing a primary role in the education of all the school groups of all ages (interview with Walsh 2019). The Captain's Room where the museum's collection of East Asian ceramics is displayed, is the space which is 'used a lot for school groups' (interview with O'Nolan 2019). In fact, as noted

previously the visitor interviews at this site could not go ahead on the date initially planned as the Captain's Room was in use by a school group.

As with the O'Neill collection, the Hunt collection also informs university level education. Current educational initiatives held by the museum include a collaboration with Limerick School of Art and Design. Students are invited to be inspired by and interpret the collection through the medium of art (primarily painting, drawing and ceramics). During interview O'Nolan, the collections curator, stated that the aim of this exercise is for the students to view the collection removed from any influence of factual information about the objects on display, students then make artistic responses to what they have seen (interview with O'Nolan 2019). These reactions are displayed alongside the collection for a few months every year. This again supports the museum's standpoint, that the visitor or user is in fact the curator or expert. This standpoint is heavily endorsed by the museum's docents through the guided tours. As previously mentioned, docents are continually asking visitors what they know about the objects displayed, rather than only telling visitors information. The collections current curator refers to this as a 'family' approach to interpretation, as information about the objects is rarely officially recorded but is continually added to, through the word of mouth between docents and visitors to the museum (interview with O'Nolan 2019).

The Hunt Museum, in the Custom House in Limerick, is presented as a 'house of curiosities' (interview with Macken 2019). The feel of the museum is 'very personal' and 'very domestic', with 'small cases and objects crammed in everywhere' (interview with Walsh 2019). This focus on domesticity dominates the master narrative told in the museum. The absence of interpretative material regarding the objects and collection, causes the vast amount of text panels throughout the museum dedicated to the Hunt family to be even more apparent. As the vast majority of information included is a biographic account of the antiquarian John Hunt and his family, the Hunt family history is the primary narrative of this museum. The family approach to the organisation and management of the museum is also testament to the whole institution being a reflection of the Hunt family and how they once lived and collected. Accordingly, the interpretation and display of the ceramic items within the Hunt collection were noted in an *Irish Times* article, published the day after the

Hunt Museum opened to the public. This article states that the museum's 'pottery and china are arranged in a deliberately domestic way, not impersonally' (Fallon 1997: 8).

With the absence of interpretative material, the Hunt Museum has aimed to inform museum visitors through the presence of the objects themselves. Text panels and labels in the museum rarely state contextual information about the objects, and any information given is inconsistent. Within this display, visual images (the objects) are therefore the primary source of learning. By merely existing and presenting artefacts and works of art to the general public, the museum can be seen to be educational in the broadest sense. The ceramic objects displayed have a 'deliberately communicative and expressive function', therefore without interpretation aids they can still 'tell a story' to some degree (Hooper-Greenhill 1991: 99). The extent to which artefacts have been placed into meaningful contexts largely depends on the museum's own policies and programmes. The meanings of museum objects are thus changeable to suit the institutions current initiatives (Hooper-Greenhill 1991: 101).

The educational strategies which have been put in place by the Hunt Museum thus allow visitors to make open interpretations, and encourage the visitor's own narratives for the objects. They are therefore for the most part personally motivated. Approaching interpretation in this way fosters a never-ending process of discovery and revision, as there exists no formalised means of linking and understanding the objects on display. For this reason, the Hunt Museum enforces a 'narrative model' of learning that respects the narratives constructed by visitors (Roberts 1997: 146). The Hunt Museum achieves this by not heavily implementing intended interpretations, leaving object interpretation open. The interpretation which occurs in the most part is presented by museum docents on guided tours, and this information is both visitor focused and driven. However, the cost of this educational model is the possibility that a proportion of visitors will overlook the collection, and therefore not take the self-generated interest necessary to construct a learning experience or acquire misinformation.

Visitor Interviews and Audience Engagement at the Hunt Museum

The visitor interviews conducted at the Hunt Museum demonstrated how visitors interact with the educational strategies put in place. In the case of the Hunt Museum, the most remarkable information gathered from the visitor interview sessions, was the diversity of narratives and objects which captured the attention of the museum audience. It appears that the individually tailored guided tours and the minimal interpretative elements within the exhibit, allow visitors to consider objects and information catered to their own personal tastes and preferences (see Chapter Three and Chapter Five).

Twelve visitor interviews were conducted at this site, from these interviews eleven different objects emerged as the visitors favourite on display. Therefore, aside from one exception, each visitor selected a different object as the one most striking to them. The Hunt Museum is the only case study explored in this study to have such a wide variety of objects selected by visitors, as at the other three sites the objects selected by museum visitors had frequent crossover. The diversity of objects selected by museum visitors as their favourite in the Hunt collection, undoubtedly correlates with the objects highlighted by docents in each individual tour.

The narratives and interpretations captured by individuals also differed in each case, making the overall visitor experience of the museum entirely personal. Examples of the narratives which visitors observed from the display included: the time the collection was assembled, the story of the Hunt family, Dublin craft makers, story of wealth, Asian culture, connections between Europe and Asia and the domestic use of ceramics. Therefore, on the day when these interviews were conducted, each visitor truly did experience a narrative of the collection which was distinct to them, and experienced an interpretation of the collection which was diverse to the experience of other visitors. By utilising tours which are different each time as the primary educational strategy and method of communicating information within the museum, each experience will be different. Consequently, each group or individual will leave with different understandings, thoughts and viewpoints surrounding the museum and the objects displayed. The educational impact of this display will also be an entirely personal occurrence. Therefore, each visitor will leave having learnt

something different from the display, and with different amounts of knowledge on the collection.

Function Two: Community Engagement Through East Asian Collections at the Chester Beatty Library and the National Museum of Ireland

Museums, from the discussion above, are no longer object based institutions in the traditional sense of the term. Instead they are 'participatory and transparent', working with diverse communities to 'collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit and enhance understandings of the world' (ICOM 2019). The changing context of museums within contemporary society is evident in the new community engagement initiatives which have been put in place. Museums are now about sharing information, providing learning possibilities, offering a space for enjoyment or contemplation and presenting experiences (Babic and Miklosevic 2003: 307-8). Access is firmly on the agenda, and there is increasing professional concern internationally for issues such as the representation of diversity and the inclusion of previously marginalised sections of society (Lang 2006: 29). Influenced by the vast amount of information which can be accessed rapidly online, today's museum visitors are thus beginning to 'expect access to a broad spectrum of information sources and cultural perspectives' (Simon 2010: ii). Cultural representation and community engagement within museum spaces are thus core practices today.

Furthermore, in recent years the nature of the relationship between collected objects and the communities they represent has shifted to become a much more collaborative process. A result of changing socio-environmental conditions is that today's Western museums 'require a new way of thinking' about collections, one which involves collaboration, 'interconnectedness', 'interdependence', 'shared authority and strong community engagement' (Janes and Sandell 2019: 7). At the core of these new perspectives is a commitment to an evolving relationship between a museum and the communities it represents; in which both parties are regarded to be equals. This is very different from the traditional curatorial approach in which museum staff, on the basis of professional knowledge and authority, control museum functioning and exhibition design. Consequently, museums can now be perceived as 'adaptive institutions' and 'activist institutions' within society (Janes and Sandell

2019: 1). Currently museums have the opportunity to bring new understanding and information, also to disrupt stereotypes and misunderstandings (Mieri 2003: 140). Community engagement initiatives therefore allow museums the opportunity to re-address themselves, and the diverse communities they seek to serve.

Moving forward museums will not be able to eliminate the pressures placed on them by external and internal sources to target a wider diversity of communities and individuals, nor should they. Therefore, it is necessary for today's museums to make every effort to show their commitment to community engagement and audience expansion (Turakhia 2003: 190). The new museology movement will continue to push museums to bridge the gap between professionals and non-professionals, by working with community members and utilising the knowledge, experiences and resources of individuals and groups (Kreps 2003: 10). Allowing communities a voice in the interpretation of objects and collections will add additional strands of value, significance and knowledge to these collections. Greater attention to the emotional and personal dimension of objects, moves us closer to overcoming the problem of the decontextualized and alienated cultural object in museums (Kreps 2003: 15).

Definition of Community and Museum Community Engagement

Community is a complex sociological term which can be seen to possess many meanings. The most commonly used definitions of community include a 'collection of people who share a common territory and meet their basic physical and social needs through daily interaction with one another' (Johnson 1986: 692). Or alternatively, 'a social group with a common territorial base; those in the group share interests and have a sense of belonging to the group' (Stebbins 1987: 534). The variety of definitions available are perhaps more informative than a single definition could be. As the variances in definitions of community indicate instead of settling on one term, we must 'address the diversity, complexity and various characteristics of communities in order to fully understand them' (Turakhia 2003: 161). However, further complexities occur as even though someone may consider themselves to be part of one community they are not excluded from being part of another community and this is where definitions become even more technical. Equally, when someone becomes part of a community, their voice is not solely that of the collective but also of an individual (Turakhia 2003: 162).

Within today's society the representational practices put in place by institutions like museums play a role in the constant dichotomy between 'dominant or less dominant cultures, mainstream or ethnic specific and national or local' (Mieri 2003: 140). There is an increasing pressure for museums to cater for and appropriately represent the individual and the many collectives they are a part of (Turakhia 2003: 162). There also exists a variety of foundations which communities can be based on beyond ethnicity and religion which have traditionally been the basis of museum policy (Turakhia 2003: 162). Museums have more frequently realised that communities are not isolated and that visitors belong to a multiplicity of communities simultaneously. In order to properly represent audiences, and the wider geographic locations which collections represent, museums must cater for both the individual and the many collectives they are a part of. Community engagement is a significant element of the audience development programmes that many museums currently have in place to address these challenges.

While I have briefly outlined the complex nature of community, in this investigation it will be utilised in regard to museums endeavouring to engage with a community group that they wish to better represent or involve through their collections.

Public Engagement, Cultural Democracy and the Chester Beatty Library

Museums and cultural institutions are powerful centres of knowledge. They have historically been associated with elitism and the making of knowledge (Mieri 2003: 143). Because of this there exists a power play in such institutions, surrounding dominant cultures and non-dominant ones, the question becoming who represents whom. Cultural democracy within museums therefore expresses the desire for every culture to be respected equally without hierarchy (Reeve and Woollard 2006: 7). This is a challenge which the Chester Beatty Library is mindful of. The key word within the museum's updated Statement of Strategy (2016-2020) is 'access'. Therefore, as previously outlined in Chapter Four, a core strand of the museum's mission statement is to 'promote a wider appreciation and understanding of the international cultural heritage embodied in the collections, and to foster relations between Ireland and the peoples whose cultures are represented in the collections' (The Chester

Beatty Library 2018a). A primary way in which the institution has attempted to achieve this is through the deconstruction of barriers, inviting diverse groups and individuals into the museum through a variety of exhibitions, programmes and events. The concept of barriers is important to understanding how museums and communities must work together to eradicate past and present inequalities of access, and build a new culture of inclusion (Turakhia 2003: 164).

Typically, one way of advancing the engagement and portrayal of diverse peoples and cultures has been through the support of collaborative projects between museums and community-based heritage organisations (Keith 2012: 45). A recent initiative put in place by the Chester Beatty Library was *The Creative Museum*. This project is a three-year strategic partnership funded by the EU Erasmus programme, Key Action 2 (cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices) and Vocational and Educational Training (VET). The project was 'created in response to the need to provide training for museum professionals and their partners to accommodate a perceived shift in the dynamic of museum engagement programmes' (Siung and Bowe 2017). The project thus aims to establish 'a new language of participation and engagement' (Siung and Bowe 2017). Throughout the course of this project museum professionals have been encouraged to test new ways of interacting with audiences, this includes the creation of partnerships, sharing practices and experiences, and also disseminating the processes and outcomes of these projects. Allowing the museum professionals involved the opportunity to learn from each other.

This project is an example of how the Chester Beatty Library has worked to deconstruct internal barriers and also implement current best practice techniques in regard to community engagement programmes. Museums are not always seen as 'appropriate partners' by non-traditional audiences, as museums often stand as representatives of authority within either local or central power structures (Hooper-Greenhill 1997: 8). Those who perceive themselves as disadvantaged by authorities will therefore often be suspicious of museum representatives in the first instance (Hooper-Greenhill 1997: 8). As a consequence, museum engagement programmes necessitate a great deal of internal effort in order to identify how they can benefit participants and how they can establish mutual trust. Museums deciding to carry out

community engagement programmes need to establish how they can provide the 'comfort of friendly familiarity in the context of sincere and respectful acknowledgement of cultural difference' before they can break down barriers (Hooper-Greenhill 1997: 8). Thus, community engagement is a two-way process. Staff must actively work with and represent the communities the museum wants to build a relationship with and communities need to feel a sense of connectedness to feel part of the museum's working life and that they belong there (Turakhia 2003: 165). However, the solutions to the barriers for the creators of sustainable lasting relationships between museums and communities are not easy or universal. Fundamentally, different kinds of museums will attract different kinds of people (Turakhia 2003: 169). Museums thus have to understand both communities and themselves, and also recognise that this knowledge is subject to change. Likewise, that on some occasions rejection will have to be accepted on both sides.

Democratising culture is a term which features regularly in current museum studies literature and debate. It refers to the public accessibility of culture, through price, location and education (Reeve and Woollard 2006: 7). Therefore, there should be no barriers to prevent individuals from participating in culture. As a result, it is not enough for museums to solely work on improving internal barriers as external barriers demand equal attention. Falk and Dierking (1992: 21-24) have written extensively about the barriers which directly affect museum visitors. They allege that there are four pre-museum visit barriers which will affect a visitor's choice to enter a museum. The first of these barriers is personal interest, cost is the second including both money and time spent, convenience is the third and finally the fourth barrier is personal benefit. Therefore, the human aspect cannot be taken out of community engagement programmes, as for these to be successful museums need to focus directly on the communities and individuals involved. This ensures that visitors will personally gain from their experience, while also making sure that visitors feel physically and emotionally comfortable within the museum environment. A significant method of doing so would be offering programmes and events tailored to specific communities and groups, insuring that both their interest and comfort levels are met during the experience.

The Chester Beatty Library hosts a variety of events, mostly free of charge, on a weekly basis encouraging a vast diversity of individuals and communities to visit the museum (The Chester Beatty Library 2018d). Including guided tours, these focus on select objects and themes from the museum collections, tours are also available in a variety of languages (Mandarin and Japanese), thus incorporating those tailored to Japanese and Chinese communities or tourists. Also available are monthly Qigong (or yoga) sessions which encourage individuals to practice a traditional Chinese form of meditation, alongside a variety of *Teens Lab* events which are held on a weekly basis. *Teens Lab* is an initiative established by the museum which runs a variety of workshops on Saturdays targeted at twelve to seventeen year olds. These workshops include manga classes based on factual Chinese folklore figures, workshops on architectural techniques, drawing and 3D printing. Further events aimed at younger audiences include a monthly showing of children's movies, a pre-school *Silk Road Travels* event and the *Silk Worm Club* which is a monthly creative workshop aimed at children aged nine to eleven. The museum also hosts a variety of other events targeted at specific communities, including a selection of interactive tours designed for people living with dementia and classical Indian dance workshops. Such collaborations and events can help further access and inclusion with regards to diversifying audiences of the mainstream museum, and at the same time they can also interrogate the museum narrative which supports and perpetuates its position of authority.

Despite such innovative practice, community groups were not involved in the design process when constructing the permanent exhibitions in the Chester Beatty Library. During interview, the museum's current Head of Collections Jessica Baldwin, explained that when the collection was redisplayed in its current location at Dublin Castle in 2000 this was simply not something that the previous curators of the collection looked into, and since then the museum has evolved in its practice (interview with Baldwin 2019). Instead, community groups play a significant role in the development of 'in focus' temporary displays put together by the museum, such as 'displays specifically designed for Chinese New Year' (interview with Baldwin 2019). The museum therefore on the most part uses events and educational initiatives as a method of engaging with community groups. Previously a temporary surimono exhibition engaged with the Japanese embassy through a partnership with

the *Japan Foundation* (interview with Redfern 2019). Other initiatives include an educational programme which works with a Thai community group called *Temiya the Mute Prince*, and a partnership with the festival *Experience Japan*. Also, the museum hosts a multi-lingual educational programme with the group *Mother Tongues* (interview with Redfern 2019). During a personal interview, the museum's Head of Collections revealed that a priority for the institution is to be equally 'conscious of both younger and older generations', thus initiating '*Tiny Toes* which is pre-school programming', 'the *Silk Worm Club* for age six to eleven, and then the *Teens Club*' (interview with Baldwin 2019). For the older generation, the museum is involved with *Bealtaine* festival and 'dementia friendly tours' (interview with Baldwin 2019). Other work in this area includes routine visits to the museum by various foreign ministers and ambassadors. The Chester Beatty Library, therefore, clearly places a great emphasis on the engagement and involvement of a wide variety of individuals, aiming to make the museum an inclusive space. In this area, the Chester Beatty Library goes beyond the efforts of any of the other institutions investigated in this study.

Many museums interpret their community engagement and audience diversity responsibilities as being limited to one area of activity or restricted to specific equality issues (Nightingale and Mahal 2012: 13). As can be observed within the Chester Beatty Library's extensive variety of initiatives, events and workshops catered to all ages across a wide demographic of the community. This is not mirrored in all institutions. The Chester Beatty Library is at the forefront of change rather than striving to catch up like many other institutions. However, some initiatives, including guided tours targeted at specific groups, can be seen as problematic. Reflecting on museum practice internationally, Simona Bodo (2012: 183) reminds us that museums should beware of outreach activities that have a 'limited direct involvement of participants', citing guided tours specifically. This is a point that is worthy of consideration at the Chester Beatty Library, as tours are a primary method through which the museum engages with its visitors. Even in this regard however, the museum appears to be accomplishing progressive work. Primarily through the museum's *Slow Art Tours* (The Chester Beatty Library 2018d), these are hosted on a few occasions each year and encourage audience participation by allowing visitors the opportunity to share their observations of the collections. The Chester Beatty

Library thus perhaps avoids many of the common problems which occur when utilising guided tours as a method of audience and community engagement.

As previously mentioned, the Chester Beatty Library promotes diversity by offering tours in languages other than English (Mandarin and Japanese). Therefore, tours are the museum's primary method of reaching non-English-language speaking audiences. This endeavour by the museum is not without its challenges. Each of the museum's tours follow a similar format (regardless of language), highlighting selected objects and themes from the Beatty collection. However, this should not be just a matter of changing the language of the standard tour, museums need to also think of the content. Tours should also cater to the needs of diverse audiences. For example, the experience of an individual brought up in Ireland but of Asian heritage may be different from that of a Chinese tourist, and again this may differ entirely from the experience of a visitor with minimal prior knowledge of East Asian material culture. A return visitor who is familiar with the museum's collection may also experience the tour entirely different from a visitor who is experiencing the collection for the first time. The existing public tour, which I have been on, primarily explores the pictorial symbolism found within select objects, how these objects were used in East Asia at the time of their production, and of course their connection to Sir Alfred Chester Beatty. This information is perhaps more interesting to individuals and groups who do not have prior knowledge of Chinese material culture and its history. The tour explores these topics at a rudimentary level, which many members of the East Asian community may find patronising or uninteresting. In the best of cases, museum tours and initiatives are instead 'rooted in communities needs and expectations rather than driven by curatorial and institutional interests' (Bodo 2012: 183).

What often distinguishes the best initiatives is not so much the will to encourage attendance on the part of diverse or migrant communities, but instead the promotion of a 'knowledge-oriented multiculturalism directed principally at an autochthonous public' (Bodo 2012: 183). The Chester Beatty Library holds other events and workshops directly catered to East Asian communities and their needs throughout the year, but this promotion of cross-cultural interaction has perhaps not completely extended to the guided tour, a key audience engagement tool within the museum.

Further challenges for the museum sector therefore lie in ensuring that the outcomes of programmes and activities aimed at promoting cross-cultural interaction between different audiences are more clearly visible and easily retrievable (Bodo 2012: 189). This points to the need for a whole museum approach to ensure the museum both sustains and benefits more broadly from such relationships (Nightingale and Mahal 2012: 24). A further option which is being increasingly explored by museums across Europe in answer to these challenges is 'culturally specific programming' (Bodo 2012: 1894). This includes the development of exhibitions and displays which draw on specific collections that might hold particular significance for an immigrant community. This approach will demand an honest, open and comprehensive rethinking on the part of museums around what it really means to carry out intercultural work.

An additional point worth noting, is that the Chester Beatty Library is prepared to adapt the objects on display according to current museum programmes and anticipated visitors. In my interview with the collection's curator, Mary Redfern, she revealed that in January 2019 Japanese scrolls which contain monsters were displayed to coincide with the world comic book convention, *Worldcon*, coming to Dublin. The scrolls were thought to appeal to 'people who are interested in sci-fi and comics' (interview with Redfern 2019). The objects on display are also frequently altered in coordination with other recurring events, including 'certain science festivals', 'fashion week' and 'Chinese New Year' (interview with Baldwin 2019). Similarly, the museum repeatedly places a kimono in the collection on display during Halloween because of its depiction of a monster. This enables the collection to link to the museum's Halloween education programme, which allows children to create animations or 'masks of the monsters' (interview with Redfern 2019). The museum is, therefore, 'constantly trying to find themes that will also assist our education program and assist our promotion' (interview with Redfern 2019).

Displaying objects in accordance with an event or relevant theme is used by the Chester Beatty Library curators to encourage the interest of repeat visitors and tourists. It is thought that continually altering the museum's displays is 'a way to involve everyone and refresh things, bring things out that haven't been seen before, and or recontextualize something which has been seen before as well' (interview

with Redfern 2019). It is clear that the exhibitions presented within the Chester Beatty Library are very audience-centred, far more so than the East Asian collections in the other museums investigated within this study, although each of the other case studies explored undoubtedly acknowledge the types of visitors they have coming to the museum, and at times may host events or educational programmes catering for these groups. Specifically, in relation to East Asian collections, no other institution changes the objects on display in accordance with changing visitor groups. Monti and Keene (2013: 35) argue that the most effective museum exhibitions work with the user in mind and take an interest in the people who use the space. If this is the case, then the Chester Beatty Library exhibit is successful due to its responsiveness to the needs and interests of visitors.

Potential for Enhanced Community Engagement at the National Museum of Ireland

The mission of the National Museum of Ireland corresponds with the conventional role of a national museum. As previously alluded to in Chapter Four, it aspires to 'interpret and promote the collections and make them accessible to audiences at home and abroad', 'be an authoritative voice on relevant aspects of Irish heritage, culture and natural history', and to 'maintain the lead role in education, research and scholarship pertaining to the collections' (National Museum of Ireland 2018b). While this statement acknowledges the need for today's museums to make collections available and accessible to a wide diversity of individuals it also places a great emphasis on traditional museum functions; the collection, interpretation and display of objects alongside educating the public. Also, the dominant focus of the museum is Irish heritage and culture, rather than that of East Asia or that of other continents.

The Museum of Decorative Arts and History will be the focus of this investigation as this branch of museum holds the *Albert Bender Collection of Asian Art*, which is in many ways comparable to the Chester Beatty Library's collection. The outreach programs held within this museum largely focus on tours for school groups which are in line with the primary and post-primary curriculum and held in the museum every week (National Museum of Ireland 2018a). Tours catered towards the education of

school groups are subsequently the only regular audience engagement initiative to occur at this site.

In regard to the Albert Bender collection, the museum occasionally hosts related events and workshops. Unlike the Chester Beatty Library, no direct effort has been made to involve the East Asian community living in or visiting Ireland with guided tours. As previously discussed, in contrast to this the Chester Beatty Library holds tours in Mandarin and Japanese in an effort to directly involve these communities. Past events which concerned the *Albert Bender Collection of Asian Art* include the launch of a book by Audrey Whitty (Head of Collections and Learning at NMI) in 2011. The purpose of this publication was to bring the collection which has been on exhibition at the National Museum of Ireland since 2008 'to the widest possible audience' (National Museum of Ireland 2011). Although this publication was not necessarily a community engagement initiative, it was pitched by the museum as a method of reaching a wider and more diverse audience. However, as this publication is costly, available in just one language (English language) and can only be purchased on premises from the museum gift shop, it is debatable how wide of an audience this actually reaches. However, the publication does add further context to the collection, including information surrounding its cultural origins.

In 2018 Dublin City Council established the *Culture Company*, which built upon the work of *Dublin's Culture Connects* (2016-18). Its purpose is to connect Dubliners to their city through making and taking part in culture. The aim is to connect people to 'museums, galleries, libraries and other cultural venues in a fun and easy way' (Dublin's Culture Connects 2018). Also, the club aspires to 'invite people to get involved, broadening the reach of culture in Dublin to as many Dubliners as possible' (Dublin's Culture Connects 2018). The initiative promotes a visit to the Bender collection at National Museum of Ireland, which includes a workshop where participants can discuss the collection after their tour of it. Although the museum's collaboration with *Dublin's Culture Connects* can be seen as a move in the appropriate direction, these events still primarily involve Irish born individuals and Dublin based community groups, and does not reach a diverse multicultural audience. As the Bender collection consists of objects which originated in East Asia,

the museum is yet to make significant strides to engage with the East Asian communities living in or visiting Ireland.

The barriers present between museums and communities cannot be built on their own, ‘for barriers to be present they must have been raised’ (Turakhia 2003: 170). For this reason, museums are constantly under fire even though they are actively trying to change their practices. It is easy to suggest that museums are responsible for the presence of barriers between themselves and the communities they seek to build relationships with. Practices such as those of the National Museum of Ireland, which have somewhat overlooked the involvement of source communities within the initiatives surrounding the Albert Bender collection, are the foundation of such attitudes. Then again in many cases this would also be ‘an unfair demonization of the museum’, and a ‘negative attitude towards the presence of barriers and their connection to museums’ (Turakhia 2003: 170). The weekly tours for school groups and the museum’s collaboration with *Dublin’s Culture Connects*, demonstrates that museum is making some effort to integrate this collection into a wider programme of events and community engagement initiatives. However, the wide diversity of initiatives presented by the Chester Beatty Library provide evidence of the many other achievable goals which the museum could set in the area.

It is important that in future initiatives the National Museum of Ireland should endeavour to involve source communities in the tours, events and programmes surrounding the Bender collection as ‘for source community members gaining access to their material heritage is vital’ (Peers and Brown 2003: 5). Critical analysis has revealed that both museums and the objects within them are a potent force in forging self-consciousness and constructing and expressing ‘national, regional and local ethnic identities’ (Kreps 2003: 2). Moreover, the development of relationships between museums and communities will often open up further information regarding collections, and will thus be a rewarding worthwhile undertaking for both groups. Artefacts have overlapping but different sets of meanings to museums and source communities and tend to be interpreted very differently by each group (Peers and Brown 2003: 5). Therefore, collaborations and partnerships between museums and communities often add further interpretations, meanings and values to museum collections.

Relationships between museums and communities can also be utilised to 'promote more diverse and less stereotypical images of communities by providing participants with the opportunity for self-representation' (Bodo 2012: 189). As a result, cultural engagement programmes can work to create shared spaces where all participants are recognised as being equal. At the same time, the experiences of museums working in this field (including the Chester Beatty Library) highlight how hard it still is even for the most forward-looking institutions to break the dichotomy between curatorship as a core function and community engagement programmes. Equally, the development and form of these new relationships is difficult, as they largely depend on the nature of the source community, the political relationship between the source community and museums, and also the geographical proximity of the museum to these communities (Peers and Brown 2003: 4). Both museums and communities consequently need to examine their potential relationship not in an isolated fashion, 'but in the context of relationships in general' (Turakhia 2003: 166). Both parties must be willing to contribute time and effort, and also pull together to overcome challenges efficiently.

Final Thoughts on Function Two: Community Engagement and the Museum Space

'Community' and 'identity' are central organising concepts within Western museums today (Kreps 2003: 10). The current programmes and initiatives presented by the Chester Beatty Library, for instance, demonstrate that museums are currently reaching out in new ways to communities of all kinds through specific events and workshops. However, museum professionals still face endless challenges as they attempt to deconstruct barriers, while 'communities perhaps feel that nothing is actively being done to include them' (Turakhia 2003: 166). The current challenge for museums is therefore to redefine their strategies, roles, policies and programmes, considering that 'they affect people and their cultural heritage' (Kreps 2003: 2). The new museology movement is fundamentally concerned with the democratisation of museum practices and bottom-up participatory approaches. It stresses the importance of community or public participation in museums, not only as visitors but also as participants in all aspects of museum work. The variety of workshops and events currently held by the Chester Beatty Library, is testament to the efforts cultural institutions are currently undergoing in order to involve diverse audiences

and communities. The few initiatives also established by the National Museum of Ireland demonstrate how widespread this movement is, with the majority of museums today establishing some effort to involve wider audiences and communities.

Today museums play a crucial role not only in preserving, continuing and managing cultural heritage but also in modelling community relations strategies. This role is especially important at a time when issues of diversity and multiculturalism feature prominently in public discourse. Museums will hopefully emerge with a new relationship with the public, which will see the public holding the power (Turakhia 2003: 191). However, during the process they must not take their existing audiences for granted, as the changes made should have the potential to benefit all visitors. A consequence of this is that museums are facing difficult challenges in learning the 'fine art of balance' (Turakhia 2003: 193), by drawing in new communities without excluding old communities. Similarly, museums are going to have to accept that they 'will never fully understand every community as they are unstable, adaptable and changeable entities' (Turakhia 2003: 193). Also, that every community may not wish to be involved with the museum. Sharing power with communities should equally not diminish the role of professionalism in museums (Kreps 2003: 155).

By placing further emphasis in these areas museums can not only serve as forums for cross-cultural understanding, but also as models of positive intercultural relationships. Museums as institutions that represent, display and interpret cultures should therefore assume a leadership role in shaping awareness of and attitudes toward cultural diversity (Kreps 2003: 157). As such museums should be concerned with not only best practice but practice that is continually reassessed in light of new approaches as well as changing social conditions and concerns. However, there is no one-size-fits-all solution and there most certainly is not an end to this argument. Therefore, museums will have to continue to function as 'laboratories for experimenting with new cultural combinations and encounters' (Kreps 2003: 157).

Chapter Six Conclusion

It has become apparent that cooperation, collaboration and participation have become key words in the vocabulary of the museum, particularly in regard to museum functioning, including community initiatives and educational programmes. Today museums play a crucial role not only in conserving, interpreting and displaying objects but also in promoting tolerance between communities and developing community relations. A method of dealing with the challenges presented by today's Western societies is for museums to demonstrate that the collections they hold have an 'indispensable value to their publics' (Falk and Sheppard 2006: 225). By emphasising the social and cultural value of a collection, museums ensure their continuing relevance to twenty-first century audiences, providing 'meaning and enjoyment to a diverse range of publics' (Janes and Sandell 2019: 7). The future of museums therefore must focus around two forms of 'sustained engagement': (1) 'engagement with the communities it serves', and (2) 'collaborative engagement between the museum and its users' (Black 2012: 1).

Displaying collections for educational means is one method of creating sustained value and engagement. Through didactic functions collections are enabled to reinforce their lasting educational impact. Museum displays are the primary vehicle through which visitors learn within the museum environment, making them an exceptionally significant tool. This has become evident through the exploration of the Ulster Museum and Hunt Museum's educational strategies.

Today's museums must respond to visitor needs, allowing them the ability to actively participate in learning processes. Learning approaches implemented by the Ulster Museum and Hunt Museum allow the visitor freedom in attaching their own ideas and values to the objects. In each case, the minimal amount of contextual information (on labels and text panels) included within the displays allows visitors the ability to construct their own interpretations and narratives. Learning from these displays is therefore personally motivated, this learning style is a valuable engagement tool for today's museums. By implementing it, museums transform from 'curator-driven' institutions to 'audience-focussed destinations' (Black 2012: 77). Visitor interviews conducted at both sites confirmed that the displays can be

experienced in different ways, as a result of the visitors' own personal motivations and interests.

The interpretation style of the Hunt Museum is progressive and encouraging for visitors. Visitors are involved in processes of meaning-making through individually tailored tours. This method of knowledge construction therefore moves the museum away from complete institutional authority. However, although progressive, the interpretative approach of the Hunt Museum is not unproblematic. In a negative light, the information shared by visitors regarding the collection during guided tours may at times lack authenticity or be altogether misinformed. This leads to the circulation and fabrication of incorrect knowledge surrounding the collection, and the misrepresentation of objects, cultural practices and societies. In extreme circumstances, such conditions could lead to distortion, indifference and falsification, this demonstrates that there exists no easy solution to the sharing of authority in museums where meaning-making and learning is concerned.

Museum collections also maintain value and engagement within today's society as community resources. In order to show awareness of the increasing diversity of society, the twenty-first century museum must be a space 'where ideas and cultures can collide positively' (Black 2012: 9). Focussing on meaningful engagement between communities changes a museum from being inward-looking, to an institution that makes a positive contribution to society. Each of the museums discussed within this study are currently engaging in some efforts to connect with museum visitors and the wider community surrounding the museum, through various programmes and initiatives. The Chester Beatty Library proved to be the institution currently making the greatest efforts in this area. The current programmes and initiatives presented by the CBL demonstrate that museums are currently reaching out in innovative ways to communities of all kinds through specific events and workshops.

Section Two: The Multiple Meanings and Identities Associated with Museum Objects

Chapter Seven forms the second distinct part of this thesis and concentrate on the museum object and collecting practices. An emphasis is placed here on the contexts and storylines which are currently disregarded within current display and interpretation strategies in the case studies investigated as part of this thesis.

The study of museum objects is an increasingly important area of museum studies research (Pearce 1994; Dudley 2012; Hill 2014). Objects exist because of the social, cultural and political constructs which define them, like other historical events objects are the results of causes. Consequently, objects are embedded within the cultures which produced and used them, and can be said to embody some of that cultures' beliefs. It is understood that objects embody unique information about humans and societies (Pearce 1994: 125) and can therefore be seen as signals, signs and symbols as much of their meaning is 'subliminal and unconscious' (Harvey 2009: 4). The underlying premise is that human made objects reflect consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly the beliefs of the individuals who produced, used or purchased them and likewise the larger societies within which these objects have existed (Prown 1995: 1). Accordingly, objects are primary historical material available for first-hand study.

Each of the four collections investigated within this study are sizeable, recorded to contain a minimum of thirty-one objects (Ulster Museum O'Neill collection) and a maximum of approximately twenty-five thousand objects (Chester Beatty collection). However, not all of the material within the Chester Beatty collection is of East Asian origin, nevertheless Beatty's collection of East Asian objects is undoubtedly large, containing 942 snuff bottles alone. It would therefore be unfeasible to explore every object individually. This study has therefore decided to focus on one example from each collection as representative of themes. Through these objects a wide diversity of themes, storylines and aspects of social, historical and cultural identity will be emphasised. Only a minute segment of the mass amount of narratives exemplified by the collections will be considered. However, the multiple possibilities of narrative from this small section of objects will serve to highlight the select few narratives

currently expressed through institutional display methods and interpretative approaches.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that in the process of this research the biographies of many more objects were explored in depth, including a pair of pug ornaments (Hunt Museum), a dragon robe (Chester Beatty Library), a tomb figure (National Museum of Ireland), a Tibetan bell (Chester Beatty Library) and a set of Japanese Surimono Prints (Chester Beatty Library). Through these objects further narratives were drawn out of the collections: gift giving, the para-Masonic Order of the Pug and William III, material identities associated with clothing, and Han (206 BC-220AD) society tomb practices. The case studies presented within Section Two were selected because of the imperative strands of history, society, identity and culture which they allude to. Thus, in exploring these objects the wider narrative of their context, origin, collection and display can be perceived.

Chapter Seven: Object Case Studies

The chapters so far have demonstrated that the narrative of the collector (consciously or unconsciously) dominates museum interpretation strategies across all four institutions. However, in each case the contextual information given focusses on a biographical account of the collector's lives at the expense of other contextual and/or historical narratives or frameworks for understanding. Through the exploration of individual objects within these collections Chapter Seven will unfold the further contexts and narratives currently excluded from museum interpretation strategies; three object case studies will be included. To explore the objects in question both Kopytoff's (1986) object biography model and Appadurai's (1986) life history approach will be employed.

Object Case Study One will further examine the attributes of collecting which are not included within the current display narratives of the National Museum of Ireland (Albert Bender) and the Chester Beatty Library (Chester Beatty) collections. Further exploring contextual information surrounding the purchase and accumulation of the collections, the collecting tastes of this era (early twentieth century) and the personal motivations of the collectors. By focussing on specific objects, i.e. netsuke and snuff bottles within the Chester Beatty Library and the National Museum of Ireland, object analysis aims to reveal that such items were popular among collectors of East Asian art during this time. Therefore, through them the collecting backgrounds of Chester Beatty and Albert Bender can be better understood and contextualised. In doing so it will ask why East Asian objects became so desirable to Western collectors, becoming apparent that through 'making, using, exchanging, consuming, interacting and living with things people make themselves in the process' (Tilley 2006: 61). Consequently, classes of objects reflect pre-existing social groups and without material culture 'we could neither be ourselves nor know ourselves' (Tilley 2006: 60). The overall aim of this section is to posit a better understanding of the journey of these objects from East Asia to the West and equally their desirability to Western collectors. These cultural shifts in the interpretation of such objects are not currently highlighted by museum narratives.

Object Case Study Two explores the Chinese pilgrim flask within the Ulster Museum's *O'Neill Collection of Chinese Ceramics*. It aims to reveal the various layers of meaning associated with this object, and also to highlight its multiple values throughout history. In doing so Object Case Study Two will decipher how the museum display of this collection has shaped the public's understanding of East Asian history and culture, by highlighting the strands of history absent in the Ulster Museum's display narrative.

Object Case Study Three focuses on Chinoiserie as a material commodity, exploring its impact on the traded and collected objects which reached the West during this period, and which are now found within an Irish museum collection (the Hunt Museum). However as argued by Stacey Pierson (2012: 12), 'considering Chinese ceramics simply as commodities is somewhat one-dimensional'. Thus, this case study will also unfold how such objects represent identity and society as material embodiments of cultural encounter. Out of the four museum collections investigated in this study the Hunt Museum holds the most extensive collection which provides an embodiment of both East Asian and Western culture, therefore the Hunt Museum is the focus of this final object case study in exploring three types/categories of Chinoiserie within the Hunt collection and the cross-cultural encounter it can be seen to represent.

Object Case Study One: Collected Objects

The narrative of the collector as revealed in the collections at the National Museum of Ireland and Chester Beatty Library

During the interviews I conducted, the curators currently responsible for the Beatty and Bender collections were asked to discuss the narratives of each display (previously discussed in Chapter Three). Their responses confirmed that the significance of the original collectors in understanding the objects continues to dominate the museum interpretation strategies. Although the Chester Beatty Library is the only museum collection explored which attempts to focus on the cultural contexts of the objects, the collector Chester Beatty still plays a central role within the museum's master narrative. The testimonies of curators also confirmed that the

accumulation of each of the collections by Western collectors has shaped, and remains critical, to their value as museum displays. The context of collection is, without doubt, imperative to better understand these collections. Beatty and Bender, both men from privileged western backgrounds, impacted the objects they accumulated in terms of interpretation and reception. Thus, the material object can be seen as a metaphorical means through which individuals can reflect on their world through material practices. Collected objects commonly become extensions of the self and come to embody (or are seen as reflections of) their collector's tastes, preferences, interests, pastimes and knowledge (Shelton 2001). Collections of objects are often made to be inseparably attached to people, becoming intertwined with the biographies of their collectors. Such objects can also simultaneously convey layered and often contradictory meanings. They will hold very different relations to the people who have made them, and to those who have collected them, regardless of the changing contexts of objects once collected, they also remain an embodiment of the culture, identity and values of the individuals who originally created and used them. Understanding the complexity of an object in terms of the material culture, from which is originates or exists in contemporary time, confers on any object many divergent layers of meaning. The perceived attachment objects retain to their cultural places of origin commonly increases their desirability to collectors; in this case both collectors under review here collected East Asian art and material culture, an area of collecting which held a vast appeal to Western collectors during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The collectors Albert Bender and Alfred Chester Beatty share many characteristics. As previously discussed in Chapter Two, both men began their collections with books, but as their tastes evolved they took an interest in East Asian objects. Many almost identical items therefore exist in the two collections. Aside from the netsuke and snuff bottles (in the National Museum of Ireland and Chester Beatty Library collections), these similarities also extend to Japanese woodblock prints, Buddhist art, ceramics, porcelain and Chinese robes. Netsuke and snuff bottles from these collections were chosen for further exploration within this object case study as they were both commonly purchased by collectors of East Asian material culture during the early twentieth century. In both cases these objects were collected from prominent art dealers of the time, thus both men's collecting would have been

subject to the market forces and availability of similar objects for purchase. Both men shared typical traits of East Asian art collectors of this era, in that they were both also patrons of painters (Pierson 2017b: 77). Additionally, both generated their fortunes in America but their collections have resided in the Republic of Ireland, as they each hold connections to Ireland as their place of birth, with Beatty returning to Ireland later in life. Like many collectors, Beatty and Bender were influenced by the collecting fashions of the times, their cosmopolitan lifestyles and their socio-economic status.

As this case study will demonstrate, what these collectors (and the art dealers they purchased from) viewed to be resonant of East Asian material culture may have actually held no particular importance to the people of their place of origin. In this sense objects become reflective of cultures and peoples, regardless of their actual usage within their places of origin, operating, instead, as symbols, signs or emblems of taste, wealth and status. The significance of objects can also be seen to alter within a collection, reflecting also the motivations of the collector; thus, their original meanings and uses can become removed from systems of interpretation and further lost if they were known at all. Accordingly, the consumption and collection of East Asian art (and artefacts), for example, reveals a great deal of information surrounding the changing attitudes towards China over time. Through their use as emblematic items, objects can consequently be seen to ‘speak what cannot be spoken, write what cannot be written and articulate that which remains conceptually separated in social practice’ (Tilley 2006: 63). As a consequence, through the study of conflicting or disregarded elements of an object’s life one can articulate values and meanings which may otherwise remain forgotten.

The Practice of Collecting East Asian Art and Artefacts

Collecting can be defined as, ‘the process of actively, selectively and passionately acquiring and possessing things which have been removed from ordinary use and are perceived as part of a set of non-identical objects or experiences (Belk 2001: 67). Collecting is a highly individualised form of consumption, often described in the history of collecting as ‘passionate’ and as a result, collectors tend to feel attached to the objects they acquire, a sense of attachment that does not generally exist with

similar everyday objects they may collect and use. Collecting arose with the advent of consumer culture, and is ‘an act of production as well as consumption’ (Belk 2001: 55). By adding an object to a collection, in some shape or form the object has been classified, selected, curated and combined with other objects. In doing so a new object is formed: the collection (Belk 2001: 55). Collecting is different to possessing as it implies order and system (Pearce 1998: 2). The result of this for the object, is that it will acquire a shared meaning alongside the other objects which it has been grouped with and a new significance as part of the collection. Collectors therefore socially reconstruct shared meanings for the objects they collect (Belk 2001: 55). The collector projects their own taste, assumptions and identity onto the meaning of the objects. Even a cursory glance at research on collecting habits in the West reveals growing interest since the advent of modern western society in the collecting of specific types of objects associated with taste, individualism and cultural prestige – from autographs (Joline 1902), to books (Currie 1931; Brook 1980; Paton 1988) to coins and stamps (Christ 1965; Bryant 1989; Gelber 1996).

In the examination of the traits and attributes of two men who devoted themselves to the collection of Asian art and artefacts, this case study focuses on a very different genre of collecting. In the case of the East Asian collections discussed within this study, the assumptions of their collectors largely reflect Western presumptions of East Asia at this time, alongside the imperial context in which these objects were produced. The objects consequently reflect the time and society to which they belonged. However, this includes both their cultural origins in East Asia and also their incorporation into the West through trade. In the West collecting objects from China, to take an example, had been a fashionable pursuit for many years at the point in which these objects were acquired.

The beginning of the twentieth century was a significant period for both the collection of East Asian objects, and for Britain’s trade relations with China (Pierson 2007: 81). As a result, the process of collecting itself which has brought these objects into the private collection and then the museum, ‘implies a severe imbalance of economic and political power’ (Barringer and Flynn 1998: 6). Other East Asian regions such as Japan, whilst not directly under the economic sphere of British influence, were nonetheless considered in a similarly ‘Orientalist’ perspective. Western

conceptualisation of East Asia as one homogenised geographic space and its material culture as a form of marketable commodity frequently collapsed different countries, regions, histories and cultures into one. Many Japanese objects (such as netsuke), for example, were equally desirable to collectors of East Asian artefacts during the early twentieth-century, and feature in collections of this era and were widely classified as Chinese artefacts.

Consuming and collecting East Asian artefacts reveals a great deal of information surrounding the changing attitudes towards East Asia over time. The two collections discussed in this case study were acquired by male Western collectors during the early twentieth century (as are all of the four collections explored within this study). At this point in time collecting East Asian objects, specifically Chinese goods, had become popular particularly as an indicator of esteem. Trade between Britain and China reached its pinnacle after the first Opium War (1839-42) when British victory resulted in a greater amount of goods than ever before to be shipped to the West. Although the trade and collection of Chinese made goods generally slowed during the second half of the twentieth century, for some collectors the practice continued. This was certainty the case for both Albert Bender and Chester Beatty.

The narrative of the Western China trade does not play a prominent role in the current interpretation strategies of the four case studies explored. Previously in Chapter Four while exploring the Bodhisattva statue, it became evident that the National Museum of Ireland includes the narrative of trade to a certain extent. The Bodhisattva head displayed within the NMI is accompanied by a label which briefly discloses the journey of this object from East Asia to the West as the result of military activity and trade (see Chapter Four). Equally, the text panel which accompanies the Ulster Museum's O'Neill collection very briefly (in two sentences) refers to trade links between China and the West, but does not however address the 'Orientalist' discourse this reflects. The Ulster Museum text panel simply states that Western trade links with China began in the seventeenth century, and that Chinese ceramics were first received with 'awe' in the West (wall text, Ulster Museum). The Hunt Museum and Chester Beatty Library currently do not explain any links to trade in the current displays of their East Asian collections. In all cases, the narrative of trade plays a very minor role in the overall interpretation of the collections,

regardless of the fact that it holds massive implications for how each of the collections came to exist within a Western museum environment. Without the China Trade and the fashion for collecting East Asian goods in the West during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these collections would almost certainly never have been donated to the museums which now retain them.

East Asian collections in particular played an important role in the construction of Western perceptions of the China and Japan during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At this stage, very few individuals 'had their understanding of the world illuminated by personal experience abroad or indeed by encounters with foreigners at home' (MacGregor 2013: xix). Consequently, many 'Westerners gained their knowledge of the East through physical encounters with the collections of Eastern materials'. Such collections, 'provided the majority with an introduction to the possibilities of the world beyond their own threshold' (MacGregor 2013: xix). Missionary activity also influenced collecting habits and the style of objects to reach the West from China and Japan (MacGregor 2013: xxii). But, consequently, it was commerce rather than missionaries which brought many Europeans into contact with East Asian society and culture. Similarly, intermittent military activity allowed much opportunity for Western collectors to acquire objects from China, as was the case for the Bodhisattva head within the National Museum of Ireland's Bender collection (see Chapter Four). This was boosted by the sacking of the Summer Palace during the Second Opium War (1856-1860) and maintained afterwards by the material recovered by numerous Western 'intelligence-gathering missions' to Western China in particular (MacGregor 2013: xxvi). Accordingly, military pursuits abroad 'brought trophies of war over many centuries' (MacGregor 2013: xxii). Thus, such objects also reflected economic and military superiority in colonial contexts.

On the other hand, Western antique shops, art dealers and auction houses also came to play an important part in the supply of goods to the collector from the nineteenth century onwards; continuing to have an impact on the collection of East Asian goods today. Shops featuring artefacts and goods from East Asia, had become increasingly visible in metropolitan cities by the late nineteenth century. Auctions involving objects from East Asia were also held in Amsterdam, Paris and London during the later nineteenth and early twentieth century. The rise of auction

house sales coincides with the fact that during the Opium Wars (1839-1942 and 1856-1860) and also during World War I (1914-1918), art markets become ‘booming’ (Howald 2018: 241). With the colonial expansion of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Western market for world art in general saw a boom (Guichard and Savoy 2018: 5). Accordingly, both Beatty and Bender depended on art dealers, antique shops and auction houses to acquire many of the objects within their East Asian collections. Auction houses in the West became much more prominent during times when the West was at war with East Asia. Indeed, art dealers and auction houses came to play a primary role in the relocation and sale of looted objects.

Collecting is often a competitive activity, no matter how narrow the collecting area. It is no coincidence that auctions are a popular means of selling collectables, ‘for nowhere else is this competitive spirit likely to be more of a public spectacle’ (Belk 2001: 68). Although of course collecting East Asian artefacts was not seen as an obscure pursuit during this period in history, it was an extremely popular pastime involving collectors with varying levels of interest. As a result, numerous art dealers, commercial agents, carriers as well as diplomats, soldiers and other military staff and private collectors contributed to the shaping of global markets and to the massive displacement of objects from East Asian countries to the Western world.

Nevertheless, the means by which East Asian material culture reached Western collections were extremely varied, according to the means of the owner and prevailing relations with the country of origin (MacGregor 2013: xix). Similarly, the selection of individual objects is an extremely individual endeavour which is entwined with the taste, means and background of the collector. It can be presumed that the objects accumulated in any collection usually have a particular significance to the collector which reflects their personality, but also their independence or reliance on others, namely art dealers, advisors and auctioneers (Muensterberger 1994: 4). Additionally, many collectors are usually influenced by the current tends of the time and the opinions of fellow collectors. This is certainly the case for the collection of East Asian material, as during the early twentieth-century the collection of such objects was extremely fashionable. Consequently, many individuals became seriously dedicated collectors of such materials. The fact that the two collectors discussed in this case study were each collecting during a similar time frame is

testament to the collecting practices which were so prominent in the early twentieth century.

Collected Objects: Netsuke and Snuff Bottles

The netsuke and snuff bottles within the Albert Bender (National Museum of Ireland) and Chester Beatty (Chester Beatty Library) collections are very similar. The snuff bottles each examples of Chinese Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) craftsmanship, and the netsuke each produced in Japan during the Edo period (1600-1868) and the Meiji period (1868-1912); as stated on current museum labels. The majority (if not all of these objects) would therefore have been perceived as having similar cultural origins. However, even though the netsuke and snuff bottles within these two collections are in many ways similar, the collector's reasons for acquiring them are often different. Each collected item can therefore hold a personal and distinct meaning for the collector, this meaning is in most cases completely different from the initially envisioned meaning and function of the object.

Cultural origins of Netsuke

The netsuke is a small toggle which would have been attached to the cord of a hanging box or pouch (known as a sagemono). This enabled it to be suspended from the wearer's belt without slipping to the ground. These objects were often carved into recognisable shapes, taking the form of miniature sculptures. The most common model is the standard carving of a figure, animal or plant. This type of netsuke has gained the most popularity among collectors. An example of a chrysanthemum carved in this style in wood (among many others) exists within the Beatty collection (see Figure 7.1 below), although this item is not currently on display within the museum (Figure 7.2 depicts current display of Japanese objects). A second common type of netsuke is the 'manju netsuke, so called due to its similarity in shape to manju rice cakes' (Davey 1974; Tsuchiya 2014). Examples of this style of netsuke can be found in the Bender collection (see figure 7.3 below).

Figure 7.1 Carved wood chrysanthemum netsuke within the Chester Beatty collection, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (2012). Photograph by the Chester Beatty Library.

Figure 7.2 Current display of Japanese objects, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (2019). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Figure 7.3 Current display of netsuke (showing manju netsuke: front left), National Museum of Ireland, Dublin (2017). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

The four netsuke in the National Museum of Ireland collection feature in a display case of small ivory objects. The information given on the netsuke includes their place and date of origin, and the materials which they are made from. However, this display sits within the wider narratives incorporated in the Bender exhibition, including Albert Bender's life and his connection to NMI Director Adolf Mahr. Therefore, the individual biography of this object is inadequately dealt with in current interpretation strategies, as much of its context and background has not been included. The complexity surrounding the context of the netsuke has been removed in order to place them within the context of their collector: Albert Bender. Difficulties which arise in doing so include supressing or overlooking the other contexts and narratives associated with the netsuke, thus by association the exclusion of social and cultural identity representations which do not correspond with the master narrative of the Bender exhibition. On the other hand, as an interpretative strategy, keeping the exhibition narrative focussed on one or two broad themes generally enables it to be easier for visitors to follow and comprehend. This is why the concept of the exhibition master narrative is a commonly used area of museum practice.

It is presumably through trade routes between East Asia and America during the early twentieth century through which Bender and Beatty built a sizeable percentage of their collections, as both men spent a large portion of their lives living in America and building their collections through art dealers in America, including art dealer Henry H. Heart for the trade of Chinese material and antiquities dealer T.Z. Shiota for the trade of Japanese material. Chester Beatty and Albert Bender were among many others who took an interest in building collections of netsuke at this time. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a large interest in the collection of netsuke was established through the sale of collections formed by the renowned collectors Gorse, Betrens, Hayashi and Tomkinson. The disposal of another collection (the *Hindson Collection*) at Sotheby's during the years 1967 to 1969 produced a further wave of netsuke collecting (Davey 1974: 11). Nevertheless, during this long period of various collectors, the value of these objects changed and generally became greater over time in the West. In Japan, these objects were often inexpensive, as they were often seen to hold little importance. In spite of this in the West the cost of these items reached astonishing heights. The greatest rise in prices was seen during the period of the Hindson sales, with the last sale in June 1969

reaching 16,000 GBP. In recent years the price of netsuke has continued to rise. Recent records show that Sotheby's sold a lot of netsuke (the *Katchen Collection of Netsuke*) on the thirteenth of July 2006 for 406,020 GBP (Sotheby's 2008). Thus, it could be argued that Netsuke have long held a disproportionally high value in terms of aesthetics and economics amongst Western collectors.

Cultural origins of Snuff Bottles

Chinese snuff bottles are another object widely found within personal collections. However, like netsuke there is a paucity of literature on their history and production in China. The bottles were produced in order to store Chinese snuff which was composed of finely ground tobaccos mixed with mint, camphor, jasmine and other aromatic herbs and flowers. Snuff bottles have been made from almost every material, in a great variety of shapes and styles (Benedict 2011). However, it was not until the eighteenth century that artistic snuff bottles began to be made in large quantities for new aristocratic patrons and collectors, this perhaps reveals that manufactures were beginning to recognise their value to Western collectors of East Asian objects. Of the precious materials listed for the use of snuff-bottles jade ranks first as it is a very hard material which can only be worked by patient grinding. Examples of jade snuff bottles can be seen in both Bender's and Beatty's sizable collections of them (see Figure 7.4 below). Glass was equally popular as a material for crafting snuff bottles. The most popular use of glass was in the creation of cameo like pieces; examples of this style can be seen in Chester Beatty and Albert Bender's collections (see Figures 7.6 and 7.7 below).

Figure 7.4 Example of a jade snuff bottle, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Figure 7.5 Carved glass snuff bottle, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Figure 7.6 Example of a painted snuff bottle, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper

Figure 7.7 Current display of snuff bottles (including painted glass snuff bottle examples), Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

The Display of the Chinese Snuff Bottles in Ireland

The approaches taken by each museum in narrating and displaying the collections can be better understood by exploring the presentation of the snuff bottles in particular. The National Museum of Ireland displays a selection of Albert Bender's snuff bottles as a single entity (see Figure 7.8 below). The objects do not have individual labels as such they are grouped together and presented under a single heading and piece of interpretative text. Correspondingly the text given states a brief outline of snuff taking in China and the use of the bottles, without going into detail regarding the actual bottles displayed.

The snuff bottles in Chester Beatty Library's collection are displayed in two locations in the museum. A small set of snuff bottles is displayed in front of a text panel on the topic of Daoism (see Figure 7.9 below). The individual label beside these objects then explains how they link into the Daoist theme of the display case, elucidating

their function for Daoist alchemists. The label discusses the mottled colour of this set of snuff bottles and reveals that these items would have been used to hold realgar pigment, a toxic arsenic compound used in small amounts by Daoist alchemists to enter a transcendent state. A second, larger display of the bottles in the CBL gives further information on snuff, its history in China and its storage (see Figure 7.10 below). This explication is detailed and twice the length of the summary on this topic given by the National Museum of Ireland in displaying Bender's similar collection. Individual labels alongside the objects additionally provide information on the various types of snuff bottle in the collection, including further information on jade snuff bottles, porcelain snuff bottles and those made from organic materials. This exhibition overall is therefore extremely informative in relation to the objects' context. The detailed information provided on various topics indicates that the Chester Beatty Library wishes for these objects to be understood as cultural artefacts by visitors, perceived in terms of their original cultural and social uses. By contrast through the small amount of information provided by the National Museum of Ireland on a similar collection, one can assume that the museum wishes for these objects to be primarily appreciated for their aesthetic qualities.

Figure 7.8 Current display of snuff bottles, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin, 2018. Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Figure 7.9 Current display of snuff bottles depicting their connection to Daoism, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Figure 7.10 Current display of snuff bottles, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

In the British museum sector, it is becoming commonplace to utilise snuff bottles as examples in the portrayal of a wide range of topics. As previously discussed an example of this thematic style of display can be seen in the Chester Beatty Library, with two broad themes portrayed through two separate displays of snuff bottles in the

collection: Daoism and the history of snuff in China. The British Museum recently redisplayed and refurbished the *Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery of China and South Asia,* previously mentioned in Chapter Two. The new display of this collection officially reopened to the public in 2017 (The British Museum 2017). The revised thematic display of the collection separates the snuff bottles in the collection and utilises them in the portrayal of various divergent themes and topics. For example, a set of two jade snuff bottles have been utilised in a display case dedicated to jade carving and painting traditions in China (see Figure 7.11 below). In this case these objects operate as examples of craftsmanship and are accordingly displayed in a minimal fashion through which their aesthetic and material attributes can be appreciated. Further themes utilised by the British Museum when displaying snuff bottles include palace interiors and collecting in Qing dynasty (1644-1912) Beijing and Chinese maritime trade with Europe (see Figure 7.12 below). Accordingly, the British Museum's *Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery* illustrates the diversity of contexts which Chinese snuff bottles can be associated with. Perhaps demonstrating that there exists no correct or incorrect way to display these items, as they can be associated with a multiplicity of circumstances and perspectives.

In terms of display, this multiplicity would apply also to the Japanese netsuke in the Dublin museums. Such small objects can be used to represent a diversity of contexts in a museum environment, they fit easily in display cases, therefore offering the option of including multiple cases in the one exhibition space. By doing so museums would have the opportunity to address the multiple meanings and identities which these objects have become associated with throughout their lives, connecting each individual display case to a diverse theme or context. Possible narratives which could be incorporated in the display of netsuke include: ivory carving in Japan, seventeenth-century Japanese fashion and the kimono, their trade in the West, their appeal to Western collectors, the symbolism they conveyed, their representation of Japanese culture and their satire of life in Japan during the seventeenth century.

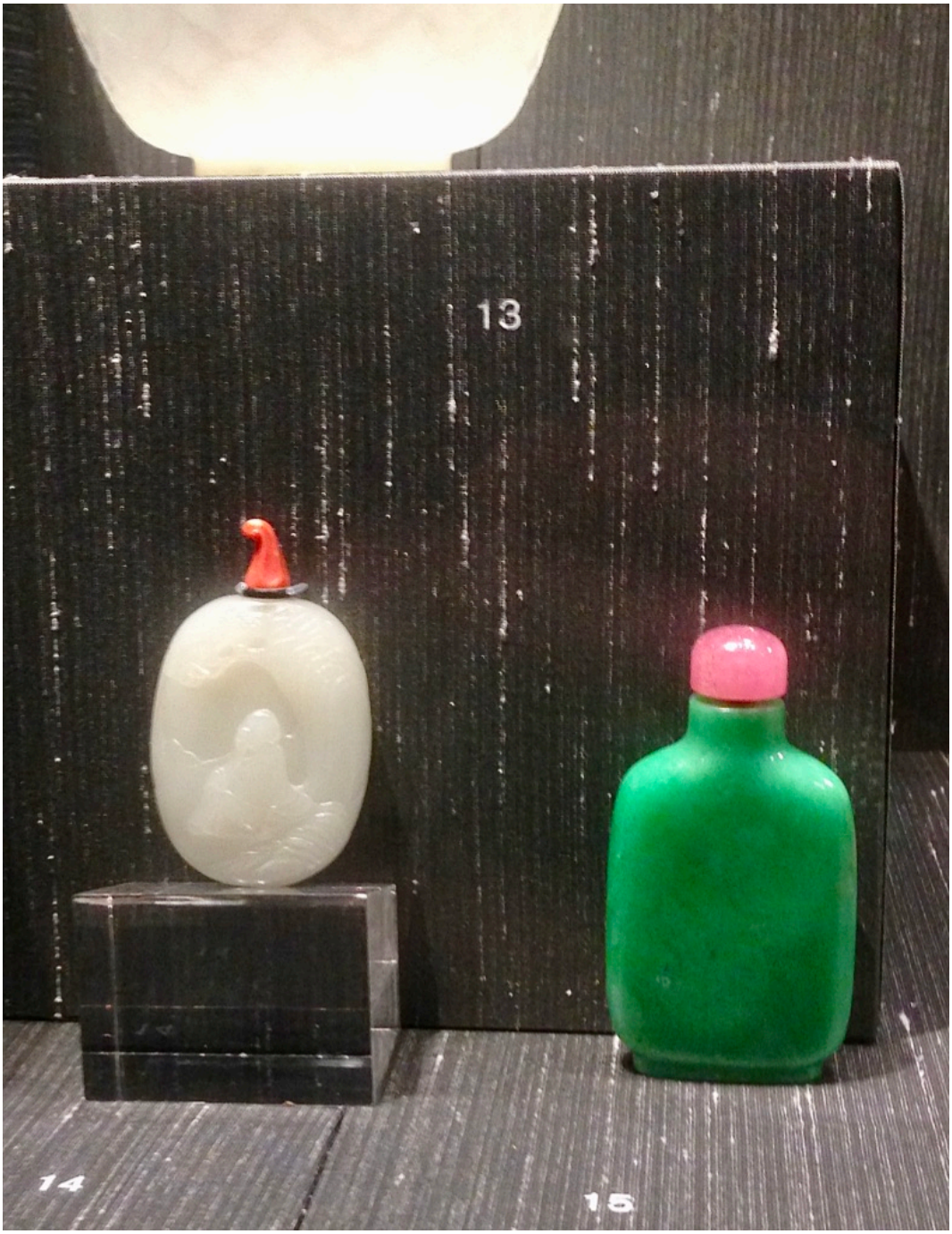


Figure 7.11 Snuff bottles displayed to illustrate jade carving and painting traditions in China, British Museum, London (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Figure 7.12 Snuff bottles (among other objects) displayed to illustrate Chinese maritime trade with Europe, British Museum, London (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Relation Between Collector and Collection

The narrative of the object's purpose and production is only one layer of meaning. Further layers of meaning and identity signified by these objects relates to that of their collector. As indicated earlier in this case study, for collectors 'the instrumental function of the objects is of secondary or no concern' (McIntosh and Schmeichel 2010: 86). A second defining characteristic of a collector is that they will 'not plan to immediately dispose of the objects' (McIntosh and Schmeichel 2010: 86) and instead it can be argued that objects are used to construct identity on a personal level (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 109). To some extent both Albert Bender and Chester Beatty used the objects they collected to construct their self-image. Material culture is therefore something 'upon which meaning is ascribed', the effect of this being that there can be no 'common basis for understanding' (Graves-Brown 2000: 4).

Accordingly, objects of the same type (in this case snuff bottles and netsuke) may be understood in different ways, 'depending on the position of the knowing subject' (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 101); which for collected objects is the collector. Saari (1997) has argued that there exist four types of collectors:

- The passionate collector who is obsessive and emotional;
- The inquisitive collector who primarily wishes to invest money;
- The hobbyist who invests for enjoyment; and
- Expressive collectors who collect as a statement of who they are (Saari 1997, cited by McIntosh and Schmeichel 2010: 86).

Pearce (1994: 10) similarly offers a range of motivations for collecting, these include: leisure, aesthetics, competition, risk, fantasy, a sense of community, prestige, domination, sensual gratification, desire to reframe objects, the pleasing rhythm of sameness and difference, ambition to achieve perfection, extending the self, producing gender identity, achieving immortality. These attributes are a useful means through which to explore the experiences of Chester Beatty and Albert Bender.

Chester Beatty can perhaps be seen most suitably as a passionate collector, as was perceived he collected excessively throughout his life. No matter where his career or personal life took him Beatty continued to collect and acquire, including in the midst of two world wars and during a long period of sickness. When Beatty became ill with pneumonia and Spanish influenza in 1917, his doctors advised him to go to a warm climate to recover (Kennedy 1988: 26). His interest in Chinese snuff bottles and Japanese netsuke inspired him to spend this time visiting East Asia. Thus, he spent six months touring China and Japan, returning from each trip with examples of 'Oriental craftsmanship and artistry' (Kennedy 1988: 28). Because of this, many items in the Chester Beatty collection can also be seen as a form of souvenir collecting. Souvenirs are embodiments of events which can be mentally recalled but not re-experienced. They are intrinsic parts of the past and 'they alone have the power to carry the past into the present' (Pearce 1994: 195). They are therefore an important part of our attempts to make sense of our own personal histories. But

unlike typical souvenir collecting Beatty displays no sentiment towards these objects, and did not struggle to part with them if he felt they no longer fitted the collection. He can thus also be seen to desire prestige, perfection and the achievement of immortality through his collection, desiring only the finest specimens for his collection, which he wished to live on after his death. It is significant to note that only 942 snuff bottles (out of the 1674 originally collected) remain in the collection today, this can be explained by Beatty's high attention to detail.

Accordingly, Beatty saved only what he considered to be the finest material for his collection. For this reason, Hayes (1958: 6) concludes that few private collections have ever been put through such 'rigorous tests of quality'. Dant and Katriel (1994: 233) have argued that the inclusion of only perfect high-quality objects in a collection is common among collectors, that this is one of many strategies towards the closure of a collection. Also, Beatty held a decisive wish that his collection be displayed to the public 'within four years of his death' (The Chester Beatty Library 2001: 10).

Albert Bender can likewise be seen as endeavouring for immortality through his collection, although he is perhaps best seen as an expressive collector. Bender assembled many sizeable collections throughout his lifetime, dedicating each of these for donation to a public institution in honour of himself or his mother. In addition to the National Museum of Ireland collection many other institutions also received donations, including Trinity College (Dublin), Mills College (California), the Palace of the Legion of Honor (San Francisco), the M. H. DeYoung Memorial Museum (San Francisco), the Louvre (Paris) and the California School of Fine Arts (San Francisco) (Whitty 2011:1), showing his international global role as a collector. In fact, the Bender collection in the National Museum of Ireland was a copy of the earlier Asian art room established by Bender in the Palace of the Legion of Honor; both of these collections donated as a remembrance to Bender's mother (Whitty 2011: 2). The precise motivations of these two collectors will next be further discussed.

Collectors actively seek out certain kinds of objects in which they are interested. The collector is often attached to particular objects because of their symbolic value (Baekeland 1994: 206). Although the exact symbolic attributes Beatty and Bender

assigned to their collections remains unknown, it is undeniable that whatever they collected was of significance to them. The meaning of collected objects is often determined by many external and experiential factors, creating a wide variety of private incentives motivating collectors (Muensterberger 1994: 4). Thus, while two collectors may desire the same object, their reason for coveting it and the way they may go about acquiring it may be and usually are entirely different. As a result, their individual choices or tastes may coincide, but what drives them depends on their personality and likewise on particular socio-cultural conditions. Collecting therefore becomes an extremely personal pursuit.

Several studies have linked extraversion and introversion to the aesthetic preferences of collectors (Baekeland 1994: 209). The preference of simple but vivid art is usually a trait of an extravert. However, both Beatty and Bender better resemble introverts in this sense as by collecting the highly detailed and delicate art produced in East Asia they have shown their compulsion towards more refined, complex and subtle tastes. Although the narrative of the collector is a dominant interpretation of Chester Beatty Library and National Museum of Ireland exhibitions, it is partial in that its focus is the biography of the two collectors and their connections to Ireland rather than their personal motivations for collecting and the socio-cultural environment in which they acquired their collections. In each case the interpretative strategy doesn't consider the fact that the collections are perhaps more representative of the tastes and motivations of the two individual collectors than they are of East Asian society and culture more broadly. The objects in the two collections are the result of the tastes and preferences of the two collectors, likewise Western taste for collecting East Asian objects during the early twentieth century and what was available in auction houses at this time. In East Asian culture these, in many cases commonplace and everyday objects, may have held little to no actual significance.

Like many collectors of the time, Beatty's interests began as a child with a special interest in stamps and minerals and continued throughout his adult life (Henchy 1986: 1). His passion for minerals intensified during his adolescent years influencing him to attend school for mining, graduating in 1898 and beginning work in mines in the South-Western United States (Chester Beatty Library 2001: 2). It thus appears

that his penchant for minerals and childhood collecting habits influenced him to commence his journey as a serious collector in his adult life. Snuff bottles and netsuke were the earliest items collected by Beatty, with one of his earliest catalogues (dated March 1914) listing 1674 Chinese snuff bottles and an almost complete collection of Japanese netsuke (Sormachi 1979: 7). These first items collected by Beatty were often carved from gemstones, with a particular emphasis on jade. Even the fact that these objects were each small and precious allows them a resemblance to the rock crystals Beatty would have mined, allowing connections to be found to both his personal tastes and his career. This area is not understood well, but in many cases the preferences of a collector can be explained by their temperament, early childhood experiences, the nature of their past and financial circumstances (Baekeland 1994: 206). Beatty waited many years before beginning a collection in adult life, with his collecting habits beginning only when his career was achieving great success. In this sense collecting can act as an allowable pleasure for someone who is very hard-working, achievement oriented and financially secure. In these cases, collectors often gather objects related to their childhood (McIntosh and Schmeichel 2010: 93). Out of the many self-enhancing motivations collectors experience one of the most prevalent is therefore seeking a reminder of one's childhood (Belk 1994: 322).

For Bender, collecting East Asian art does not seem to have held any appeal until later in his life and following the death of his cousin and close friend Anne Bremer (Whitty 2011: 3). Nevertheless, starting at this time and continuing for the remainder of his life, Bender formed several significant collections of Asian art for donation to public institutions. It has been noted by Baekeland (1994: 209) that even when a collector barely looks at the items he has collected, simply owning art may allow the collector some comfort. Therefore, many collectors begin their collections at times of personal grievance or great challenge. For some collectors, art seems to make their world more 'orderly and intelligible', by helping them to structure their lives at times when then need it the most (Baekeland 1994: 215). Furthermore, the search process for objects to collect is a thrill-seeking experience in itself. The ardour and passion driving such behaviour in many cases allows the collector to experience a sense of purpose and worth (Belk 1994: 320). Therefore, while the motivations behind collecting are clearly complex and multifaceted, it is notable that many of these

motives offer the collector the development of a ‘more positive sense of self’ (McIntosh and Schmeichel 2010: 82). Regardless of the type of object collected, the act of collecting is thus an extremely individual and personal pursuit. The current interpretations in the Chester Beatty and Albert Bender displays centre on the lives of the collectors biographically, not necessarily their lives as collectors. Adding additional information on the personal traits that motived their collecting pursuits would enhance understanding of the collection, as the act of collecting cannot be properly understood as removed from the psychological motivations of the collector. Inclusion of this context opens up the collections as assemblages which have been constructed through the perception of an individual, rather than as assortments of cultural artefacts detached from personal feeling and emotion.

The performance of acquisition offers collectors many emotional and personal experiences and has often been likened to a process of ‘tension accretion and tension reduction’ (McIntosh and Schmeichel 2010: 88). Setting a goal (planning the attainment of an object) serves to increase tension in self-esteem, while successfully completing this goal (procuring the object) serves to release tension. Likewise obtaining knowledge in a particular area of collecting may also expand an individual’s self-complexity, bestowing ‘positive effects on self-esteem’ (McIntosh and Schmeichel 2010: 89). As previously mentioned collecting can thus be paralleled to a flow experience, this is characterised by ‘enjoyment, environmentally directed attention and a lack of self-awareness’ (McIntosh and Schmeichel 2010: 91). Overall these attributes of collecting instigate a positive emotional state in the collector, perhaps explaining why many collectors like Bender turn to collecting at challenging times.

Akin to any complex form of human activity collecting has many meanings, both at the level of the individual and of the wider culture (Dant and Katriel 1994: 235). Often collectors themselves cannot explain or understand their drive to collect, nor can they call a halt to their habit (Muensterberger 1994: 3). However, it is also significant to note that for many collecting is not entirely a personal pursuit. Chester Beatty purchased the majority of his collection through art dealers and in salerooms through agents, as he himself was ‘reluctant to compete in public for material’ (The Chester Beatty Library 2001: 8). For Beatty’s Chinese and Japanese collections in particular,

he often employed an acknowledged authority to build the collection for him (Henchy 1986: 1), depending on this person's knowledge and expertise. When he returned from his travels in East Asia he retained an agent (Yataro Okita) to continue the acquisition of Chinese and Japanese material for him (Croke 2017: 64).

Letters between Bender and Adolf Mahr (National Museum of Ireland Director at this time), show evidence that the collection was actively purchased from art dealers, with the sole intention of being bequeathed to the National Museum of Ireland. Two main dealers were involved in sourcing this material from China and Japan: Henry H. Heart, who frequently wrote to the museum with explanations regarding many of the donations; and, T. Z. Shiota who was responsible for the collection of much of the Japanese material (National Museum of Ireland 2017). A letter from Bender to Mahr on the 18th January 1932 exposes Bender's reliance on the expertise and knowledge of art dealers, when purchasing East Asian art. It states that the dealer who discovered a set of Japanese paintings (presumably Shiota), had 'never before discovered such a complete collection' (Whitty 2010b: 80). The dealers responsible for the acquisition of the Bender collection are mentioned throughout labels and text panels in the exhibit. However, what is not apparent is the instrumental role dealers often play in actually shaping the collection. In many cases the dealer is instrumental in shaping the collector's tastes and decisions. Art dealers have at their disposal 'a number of more or less standard devices' (Baekeland 1994: 212). There are many ways in which dealers can spark enthusiasm in collectors, including the assurance that a certain museum curator has approved of the object, the intimation that an esteemed collector is interested in it, the guarantee that the object is very rare, unique or has come from a renowned collection or the pledge that the price for it will soon rise. In using such manipulations, the dealer plays on the collector's belief in good taste and the judgement of experts. The dealer may also use personal attributes of the collector to his advantage, playing on the collector's need for uniqueness or high quality, on their compulsivity or on the collector's desire for value (Baekeland 1994: 212).

Both Albert Bender and Chester Beatty have achieved an element of immortality through their collections. Scholars working in this field (Baekeland 1994; Belk 1994; Dant and Katriel 1994; Duncan 1995; McIntosh and Schmeichel 2010), suggest this

is a major motivation of many collectors, and the reason underpinning many donations to museums. By donating a collection to a museum, the collector ‘leaves behind a part of himself and perpetuates his name for all time’, something which is often not possible through business, professional activities or children (Baekeland 1994: 217). Consequently, for many collectors without children, their collections ‘may literally become their offspring’ (Baekeland 1994: 217). This is perhaps the case for Bender as he never married nor had children, instead devoting his life and finances to the arts. Bender committed an estimated ninety percent of his income to charitable, educational and creative institutions (Mullins 2011: 31). Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that it was through his collecting and donation habits that Albert Bender was attempting to leave his mark on the world. The persistence of Bender in ensuring that his collection was donated to the National Museum of Ireland regardless of the conflict and challenge he faced with museum Director Adolf Mahr is perhaps testament to this. The NMI collection was never intended to be a personal collection, and was acquired for the sole purpose of donation to the museum, therefore its primary purpose was for enduring public display.

The achievement of immortality through a collection can be linked to the need for closure in the collection, as for many collectors, it is only through a finished and complete collection which their name can live on. However, the need for closure no doubt varies with the personality of the individual, and those with a particularly strong need for closure may in fact choose types of collectables that lend themselves to completion (Dant and Katriel 1994: 230). Similarly, at the same time there seems to be a paradoxical fear of completing a collection and collectors often redefine collecting interests as completion nears (Belk 1994: 323), something which is evident in both Beatty and Bender’s collecting habits as both men had various divergent strands to their collecting interests. In spite of this, Bender and Beatty also differ in their collecting behaviours. Chester Beatty collected continuously throughout his life adding to the accumulation objects he had previously obtained and removing objects which he did not feel were of an adequate standard, with no apparent urgency for completion. However, in contrast to this Albert Bender often donated complete sets or finished collections to museums and other cultural institutions. Regardless of the manner in which objects are collected it remains evident that on some level at least, collectors must ‘live with a great deal of ambiguity’ regarding their prospects for

producing closure (Dant and Katriel 1994: 234). This has caused a trend in the West since the eighteenth century for specialisation among collectors (Belk 1994: 19). This assists the collector in defining a more manageable collecting task, and limiting competition so that the chances of the collection being unique are increased. This is evident in Beatty and Bender's collecting practices as both men had diverse collecting interests (paintings; books; etc.), they were also seen as specialist collectors of East Asian art.

The achievement of immortality through collecting is also congruent with terror management theory. This theory maintains that 'people are motivated to participate in culturally approved activity in order to ward off the awareness of their mortality' (McIntosh and Schmeichel 2010: 87). Thus, cultural practices like collecting may reduce death related anxiety by offering the hope of immortality. In line with this, collectors like Beatty and Bender often maintain that the artistic legacy of their collections should benefit future generations. The continued use of each collection for education and outreach as explored in Chapter Six, is a way in which the collections still benefit the public today. Chester Beatty in particular was very open about his desire for his collection to benefit the public for generations. When he came across 'Oriental objects of value or significance on his travels, he felt a duty to purchase them and keep them together' (Henchy 1986: 1). He did this with the hope that one day people could study and learn from them (Henchy 1986: 1).

Bender likewise was adamant that his collection should be displayed for the benefit of future generations, also so his own and his mother's name could live on. Such motivations imbue collecting with a heightened sense of purpose, which is consistent with terror management's notion of striving for symbolic immortality (McIntosh and Schmeichel 2010: 87). Furthermore, for the collector the recognition of a collection as being important for others in this way legitimises what can otherwise be seen as 'abnormal acquisitiveness' (Belk 1994: 320).

Conclusion: Collected Objects

Museum collections are not representational, but instead symbolise many layers of meaning. Their existence is 'dependent upon principles of organisation and

categorisation' (Stewart 1994: 254). The moment the netsuke and snuff bottles purchased by Beatty and Bender entered private collections, they became metaphors and categories of objects in the mind of the collector, remaining in a similar classification system upon entering the museum space. Also, perhaps becoming an unrealistic portrayal of East Asian culture in general; arguably reduced to a materialisation of cultural stereotypes, when, in fact, they are examples only of particular styles of crafted object, largely sold to the Western market at the time of their collection (early twentieth century).

In exploring these objects, it became apparent that through their acquisition, valuation and organisation, they play an important role in constructing the world of the collector (Pearce 1994: 194). This includes the construction of the collector's individual identity and also a construction of the wider contexts to which these objects can be associated. Through the connections these objects retain with the history of trade relations between East Asia and the West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, they can be seen to construe a Western image of East Asia, acting as a memoir of the position of East Asian cultural goods as coveted Western commodities at this time. When objects are linked to histories of imperial power and colonial control, difference and power are issues which must be addressed in any discussion of museum display or personal collection (Low 1996: 1). As Beatty and Bender were both Western/Irish-American men, the act of collecting these objects of another culture in itself implies a power imbalance.

Museums play a pivotal role in the construction and maintenance of cultural power structures in the West and as such museum collections are central to the construction of the dominating perceptions of previously imperialised or colonised cultures. The classification and exhibition roles of the museum are the primary means through which this process occurs, as exhibitions make the past 'visible and knowable' (Bennett 2004: 2). Consequently, instead of being embedded in power structures, museum spaces often play an active role in 'producing knowledge through the institutionalised forms of power which lie behind them' (Bennett 2004: 5). The current interpretations placed on the Japanese netsuke and Chinese snuff bottles must therefore be seen as knowledge constructions. Such interpretations are

also imperative markers of cultural understanding and the representation of a complex period in history.

The context of the collector presented in current interpretations is partial, in that it doesn't disclose individual motivations for collecting. This case study has also uncovered that collections cannot be fully understood without taking into consideration the psychological motivations and intentions of the collector. Including this information in a display would equally encourage an entirely different reading of the objects. However, in every museum display interpretative decisions are always made. As Chapters Three to Six explored, the museum has a variety of motivations for implementing select narratives, ranging from educational goals, to institutional missions to the museum's programmes and events. Therefore, selective interpretation is not necessarily ineffective, as it often corresponds with the specialism of the museum's staff and the museum's wider institutional goal. But the museum visitor needs to be made aware of the selection processes which take place, likewise care should be taken in excluding narratives. Taking account of all possible narratives before making an interpretative decision could allow the museum to make more informed choices. This case study has found that the narratives overlooked in displays are often as revealing as those included. Equally, excluded narratives offer new understandings of objects that would perhaps otherwise be forgotten.

Object Case Study Two: Multiple Values

Exploration of Meanings Associated with a Chinese Pilgrim Flask in the Ulster Museum

Object Case Study Two explores the Chinese pilgrim flask in the Ulster Museum's *O'Neill Collection of Chinese Ceramics* (see Figure 7.13 below). The focus of this case study will be the social processes which this object provides insight into. Through an examination of the production, commodification and use of the pilgrim flask an indication of the lifestyles, experiences and choices which this object has been associated with, and which have led to its significant value in today's Western society and today's contemporary art market, will become apparent. Accordingly, Emmison and Smith (2000: 111) have argued that objects are not just things, rather that they are 'reflections of the wider lives of communities and individuals'. Physical objects are closely related to everyday experience and everyday practical activity. Museum objects thus present an opportunity to explore the values which they were once (and continue to be) associated with. The strands of value that will be discussed in this case study include: Chinese cultural value, social and community value, artistic value, spatial and symbolic value and market value.

Figure 7.13 Pilgrim flask, porcelain, Ming dynasty, Yongle period (1403-1424 AD), Ulster Museum, Belfast (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

When Sir Con O'Neill was the Chargé d'Affaires in Beijing during the 1950s he created a collection of Chinese ceramics. This period was the peak of blue and white ceramic collecting in the West, becoming 'much less fashionable among collectors'

towards the end of the twentieth century (Pierson 2004: 10). In 1960, he loaned part of the collection to the Ulster Museum, the collection was purchased by the museum in 2002. The O'Neill collection contains many important and esteemed pieces of earthenware, stoneware and porcelain from the Tang dynasty (618-907) through to the Qing (1644-1912) dynasty, thus many items in this collection are very valuable in today's art market. In general Chinese and Asian art is currently experiencing a steep rise in value, accounting for 23% of global art sales in 2018 (The Art Market 2018).

The pilgrim flask, which is the subject of this case study, dates to the Yongle period (1403-1424) of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). The Ulster Museum's records show that an almost identical piece has recently been valued at over £500,000 by *Far Eastern Collector*. The collection's current curator spent a great deal of time researching the financial value of the collection prior to its purchase in 2002. The financial value, necessary to purchase or insure museum objects when on loan, is reserved only for those transactions and is rarely highlighted in museum interpretations and narratives. The O'Neill pilgrim flask is particularly unusual and rare, it remains one of the only examples of this form decorated with a floral pattern of this style. Irrespective of this particular object's value, all fifteenth-century blue and white porcelain from East Asia has long been greatly appreciated and valued in the West. I have chosen to explore this object because it provides an example of how the complexity of narratives surrounding objects in East Asian collections are rarely expressed fully by museum displays.

Many systems have been proposed for classifying and examining objects. This case study draws upon Riggins (1994: 11-15), who provides an extensive set of general conceptual tools for this purpose. Riggins suggests that objects are either intrinsically active and are intended to be used and handled or intrinsically passive and are intended for decoration or contemplation. As the pilgrim flask has both been an object intended for use and an object intended for viewing in a museum display it has fluctuated between these two states of being. There is thus an important need to distinguish between 'normal use' and 'alien use' when exploring an object. This case study will first explore intended use of the Pilgrim flask, it will then consider the unintended or 'alien phase' by becoming part of the Ulster Museum collection. In line

with Riggins' (1994) categories new insights into the social and cultural ideologies underpinning this object will be offered.

Intended Use Value of the Pilgrim Flask

Chinese Cultural Value of the Flask

One of the first known examples of the pilgrim flask dates to the Northern Qi dynasty (550-577). Quite famously a set of stoneware pilgrim flasks were excavated from the tomb of Fan Cui in Anyang (Henan) in 1971. This is where the connection between early examples of pilgrim flasks and Ming dynasty (1368-1644) wares can be found. The Ming dynasty tended to look back to earlier dynasties for inspiration (Macintosh 1977: 28). Earlier pilgrim flasks often have full circular bodies and bow shaped handles attached to a narrow neck. The flask currently displayed in the Ulster Museum is a prime example of this traditional style. Through the Ulster Museum's flask, a trait of Ming dynasty culture is thus revealed, as the visual appearance of the flask reveals that Ming dynasty China was an era which greatly appreciated its cultural heritage and traditions in regard to porcelain production. By exploring the origins of the flask its original use value can also be appreciated, as a practical object which held a large quantity of water and was easily carried on long journeys. The appearance of the flasks in a Northern Qi dynasty tomb reveals that these objects were valuable in Chinese culture, likely as valuable objects of use, a method of allowing the deceased to take water with them on their journey into the afterlife.

It can also be argued that this style of flask is attributed to a common type found in the Middle East. As it was common for Ming craftsmen to look outside the empire for inspiration, Ming blue and white styles were largely inspired by the Middle East (Macintosh 1977: 37). Through the Ulster Museum's pilgrim flask, the impact of Middle Eastern culture on China during the Ming dynasty can thus be deciphered. Another aspect of Chinese history and culture embodied by this object is the impact of trade. It was during the Ming dynasty that the Portuguese first reached China from Malacca (closely followed by the Dutch), instigating the distribution of Chinese porcelain throughout Europe. This flow of porcelain increased in the following centuries with many European explorers and merchants beginning to appear in East Asia. By the twentieth century, when Con O'Neill would have collected his porcelain

objects, an interest in Chinese material was well established in the West. Regardless, as commonplace as Chinese blue and white porcelain became in the West, Ming dynasty pieces remained a rarity.

The current display of the Ulster Museum's pilgrim flask (see Figure 7.14 below) does not represent the value of this object as in any way related to its cultural history. The label presented alongside the flask presents only basic information about the object's name and date of origin, therefore narratives surrounding the original use value of the object and its reflection of Ming dynasty culture are unrepresented. In doing so this greatly impacts upon the understanding of East Asian history and culture presented to the museum visitor, as current interpretative strategies overlook the significance of presenting the historic and cultural context of the pilgrim flask.

Figure 7.14 Display of the pilgrim flask, Ulster Museum, Belfast (2018). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Social and Community Value in Ming Dynasty China

Another narrative missing from the current display of the Ulster Museum's pilgrim flask is its place in Chinese society, and equally the reflection of Ming dynasty society which this object embodies. The pilgrim flask displayed in the Ulster Museum dates to the fifteenth century (Yongle era 1402-1424 AD); as stated on the museum's object label. During the Yongle reign a more 'sophisticated taste in ceramics was in vogue', and the potters (supported by increasing imperial patronage) were given opportunity to use the medium with skill (Macintosh 1977: 35; Harrison-Hall 2014). This suggests the sophistication and rarity associated with the Ulster Museum's pilgrim flask. However, few examples of early wares from the Yongle era have been preserved. The fact that very few porcelain pieces from this era have survived adds further significance and value to the Ulster Museum flask.

Porcelain production was an extremely significant undertaking of Ming society, with a significant portion of society's imperial resources invested in this area. During the Ming dynasty Jingdezhen (or Ching-tê-Chen, the largest of the factories dedicated to porcelain production) became the ceramic centre of China and enjoyed a great deal of imperial patronage from about 1400 AD until the first Chinese republic of 1912. The work of this pottery was a highly organised social endeavour, production was based on a 'piece-work system', thus one object would pass through several hands (Li 1996: 208; Gerritsen 2020). The outlining of the designs and the filling in was achieved through the work of more than one artist, making this style of work collaboratively produced by multiple members of society. During the Ming dynasty artists or craftsmen were primarily born into the group at Jingdezhen, passing their skill down to the next generation (Li 1996: 208). Therefore, Jingdezhen can be argued to have been its own contained society, constructed by generations of potters. The objects produced at Jingdezhen were distinct, in that they were crafted from the finest materials by the best artisans, attributing to their high value in the West today.

The style of Ming ceramics has been described as 'brilliant and colourful', with 'massive and strong shapes' (Li 1996: 208). These characteristics can certainly be observed in the Ulster Museum flask, as this piece is both large and vibrantly coloured with cobalt blue. During a personal interview with the collections current

curator it became apparent that the current display of this object aims to ‘show off the blue and white porcelain’ (interview with Mawhinney 2019), by placing it on a red plinth at the top of the display case (see Chapter Three). However, the Ulster Museum’s pilgrim flask offers more than its aesthetic appearance, also allowing insight into the porcelain production methods of Chinese society at this time. Blue and white ceramic wares were often inspired by decorative techniques with brush and ink (Li 1996: 208), as can be observed in the Ulster Museum example, Ming dynasty porcelain was often entirely covered with designs. Drawn designs, including those seen on the pilgrim flask, often consisted of ‘characteristic spiky leaves in a darkish blue enriched with blackish spots’ (Boulay 1963: 40). These spots were caused unintentionally by the pigment used, and are very aptly referred to as causing a ‘heaped and piled’ effect (Li 1996: 208). In later eighteenth-century wares these technical defects have been applied deliberately, to replicate the Ming wares that have since been so highly valued in both East Asia and the West. In particular, Yongle wares have become highly esteemed.

The blue and white wares produced during the Yongle era are very rare and command high prices today. However, until about 1920 what we now know to be fifteenth-century blue and white was unrecognised the West. To a large extent Ming porcelain set the groundwork for popular Chinese blue and white porcelain traded to the West during the eighteenth century (the height of the China Trade). Thus, the discovery of earlier blue and white porcelain was received with much enthusiasm and coveting in the West. Generations of later potters have continued to copy the wares of this period. Resulting in blue and white porcelain becoming a symbol of ‘preciousness in contemporary English discourse’ (Pierson 2013: 57). The impact of these wares on Western culture may be gauged by the large number of porcelain pieces which were mounted in silver when they reached the West (later explored in Object Case Study Three). During its own era in East Asia, fifteenth-century blue and white had also gained recognition and wide appreciation at the Imperial Court and among scholars of the period (Pierson 2013: 57; Harrison-Hall 2014).

By removing the pilgrim flask from the society which produced it much of the object’s social value is diminished, thus the object cannot be fully understood. Within its current display context, the Ulster Museum’s pilgrim flask has been largely removed

from the tastes, values and practices of Ming society, as current interpretations of the object do not incorporate these strands of information. The object is therefore primarily appreciated for its aesthetic traits, and while Ming porcelain has been perceived as aesthetically beautiful for centuries in both East Asia and the West, a full understanding of why this is cannot be perceived without the social context of this object. By further exploring the context of Ming society, this case study has underlined the fact that much of this object's value derives from the collaborative production methods used at Jingdezhen and the skill of Jingdezhen potters who were largely born into a community of craftsmen. The value of Ming ceramics therefore lies in the social value of its production, something which could not be replicated by Chinese potters after the Ming dynasty had ended or indeed by Western artisans regardless of their best efforts.

Artistic Value of Blue and White Porcelain

A further aspect of the pilgrim flask's value lies in its ceramic style, it is indisputably accepted that Ming dynasty blue and white ceramics were of exceptional quality. However, the quality of the blue pigment used in the making of these ceramics varied considerably throughout the Ming dynasty. The supplies of imported cobalt were uncertain and the locally mined cobalt was of much inferior quality. Consequently, a controversial topic is the source of the raw material used for Ming underglaze cobalt decoration (Li 1996: 209).

The cobalt used for the blue in Yongle period wares (when the Ulster Museum piece was produced) primarily came from Persia, where it had been in use since the thirteenth century, producing varied hues from light blue to almost black (Li 1996: 209). The use of this Persian pigment was sustained throughout the Yongle period and was most likely used on the Ulster Museum piece. The imported cobalt used in Yongle wares produced the dark specks caused by excess cobalt and iron which have previously been discussed.

During the regions following, the Yongle period ports were closed to further imports (Li 1996: 209). Therefore, natively sourced cobalt soon became the only type of cobalt used in the manufacture of blue and white porcelain. Accordingly, in today's art market earlier wares (those dating to the Yongle and Xuande periods), are seen

to be of greater value because of the finer quality cobalt used in the making of these pieces and the vibrant blue patterns achieved. Therefore, the current economic value of the pilgrim flask is largely a result of the materials it has been made from, namely the cobalt pigment used in its manufacture. The perceived significance of the cobalt used to make the pilgrim flask is another strand of this object's context and value which has not been included in current museum interpretations. By taking into account the high value of all Ming blue and white ceramic wares, and in particular the esteem given to those produced during the Yongle period, the importance of this object is established. If the Ulster Museum were to add this context to the current display of the pilgrim flask, the significance of this object in a museum collection would be reinstated. In doing so it would truly become apparent to visitors why this object is prominent and valuable.

Current Museum Value of the Pilgrim Flask

The Spatial and Symbolic Value of the Pilgrim Flask

For the pilgrim flask, displayed as part of the O'Neill collection in the Ulster Museum, questions of space and place associated with this location are central to its current understanding. Museum objects do not exist in a vacuum; rather they are always 'positioned in particular spatial contexts' (Emmison and Smith 2000: 109). To return to Riggins' typology introduced at the beginning of this case study, Riggins (1994: 113) suggests that aside from classifying objects in order to understand them we also need to examine their 'display syntax'. This refers to the ways that objects are organised in relation to each other in a museum setting. The pilgrim flask is currently presented within a display case alongside twenty-seven other objects also belonging to Con O'Neill's collection. Each of these objects are ceramic examples from various points in Chinese history. The clustering of objects in this manner is often a good indication of a belief that a number of objects somehow belong together in a set, or that they have some common significance; as is frequently the case for a museum collection (Riggins 1994: 113). In this instance, these objects can be seen to belong together as they were collected by O'Neill and are now part of the Ulster Museum's collection (purchased by the museum and no longer belonging to the O'Neill family), each object also shares Chinese origins. The grouping together of objects in this way generally adds to their symbolic value, as they collectively embody a greater

significance or meaning. The objects now hold a collectively generated meaning as a museum collection, together these objects are seen by the museum to represent the broad history of Chinese porcelain. The symbolic value of this collection for the Ulster Museum is therefore to document the early history of Chinese ceramics (Mawhinney 2002: 1).

Spatial settings are equally important in understanding an object's relationships with human sense of scale (Emmison and Smith 2000: 109). In the case of the O'Neill collection, the interaction of these objects with individuals including the collector Sir Con O'Neill, museum curators and the individuals who both produced and traded these items in fifteenth to eighteenth century China, is elided completely. Through their accumulation by O'Neill the value of this collection of objects has shifted and they have primarily become objects of 'personalisation' (Emmison and Smith 2000: 116). Therefore, as once mass-produced objects they have become transformed by their collector to display individuality and the identity of their collector.

Within a museum setting the pilgrim flask is no longer an object of use, and can no longer be seen as an objective indicator of social activity. Cultural origins and primary social values are still encoded in the object to some extent, but the meaning of the object (in terms of museum display) has shifted as it is today comprehended as belonging to a collection. This is primarily due to the interpretative strategy implemented by the Ulster Museum, as the dominant narrative of this display is the context of collector Con O'Neill, apparent in the display's title: the *O'Neill Collection of Chinese Ceramics.* The prominent narrative of the collector was also reflected in the visitor interviews conducted at this site. As previously discussed in Chapter Three, the story or aspect of history which the majority of museum visitors felt was depicted by this display was the story of O'Neill. Within their current spatial setting the interaction these objects have had with both museum curators and their collector therefore become most prominent, as it is these interactions which have led to their current existence in a museum collection. Therefore, the dominant value currently portrayed through the collection is that of O'Neill.

The accumulation of this object by O'Neill, an individual who belonged to a reputable family (son of the first Baron of Rathcavan) has enhanced the symbolic value of the

pilgrim flask in its current museum context. In doing so the Ulster Museum has appropriated this object as a vehicle for portraying the history of Northern Ireland (where the museum is located) by connecting the collection's narrative to a man born in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, O'Neill's father was a prominent Unionist politician who represented Antrim at Westminster from 1915 to 1952, and was the first Speaker of the Northern Ireland Parliament (The Times 1988), although the current display does not address the political background of the O'Neill family. The actual purchase of this collection and the collecting motivations of Con O'Neill cannot be examined further as the museum does not hold any records on O'Neill or the initial loan of this collection. The Ulster Museum's early records were destroyed in a fire following the bombing of Malone House (where the museum's records were initially kept) in 1976. The only information known is that O'Neill's family connections in Northern Ireland led him to loan the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery (later the Ulster Museum) part of his collection before he travelled to Finland to be the British Ambassador in 1960 (Mawhinney 2002: 1).

Furthermore, the actual placement of each object in a museum space also allows insight into how it is to be understood. Objects which are highlighted in museum exhibitions are often seen as 'more valuable or esteemed than those which are understated' (Emmison and Smith 2000: 113). The O'Neill collection is displayed somewhat like a pyramid. The pilgrim flask is presented at the top of the display case, arguably one of the objects which takes centre stage of this exhibition. Its position allows it to be one of the first objects the visitor sees when approaching this display. A red plinth is used to attract the visitor's eye and draw further attention to the blue and white Ming dynasty objects displayed at the highest point of this exhibition. Highlighting in this sense, is a method commonly used by museum exhibition designers. It is a process which involves some objects being positioned in ways which attract maximum attention (Emmison and Smith 2000: 113).

As a final step in evaluating the 'display syntax' of an object Riggins (1994: 15) also speaks of 'flavour'. By this he refers to the general impression or atmosphere given off by something. The general impression of this collection in its current environment can perhaps most suitably be summarised as one of prestige, as the collection now belongs to a national institution. The white space and polished display case which

contains the collection certainly gives the impression of a prestigious museum or gallery setting. A sentence in the text panel presented alongside the collection discusses how prized these objects became in Europe, ‘more prized than gold’ (wall text, Ulster Museum), which undoubtedly adds to the air of importance and prominence surrounding these objects. The rest of the text panel goes on to discuss O’Neill’s formation of this collection. It therefore becomes apparent that the museum aims to highlight the fact that these objects have been highly valued in Western society for centuries. The current value attributed to the O’Neill collection is also apparent through the resources which have been spent in order to collect, restore, conserve, purchase and display these items for public viewing.

The Market Value of the Pilgrim Flask

The high value and significance which has become associated with the pilgrim flask today corresponds with the current market value surrounding East Asian art. The global art market is currently experiencing a period of significant structural change (Zineng 2011: 460). Over the past twenty years the market for historical and contemporary art has become structurally significant; if a relatively small part of global corporate world (Hams 2013: 536). Between 2006 and 2008 ‘art from robust developing economies like China and India saw unprecedented spikes in both the volume of trading and actual artwork pieces’ (Zineng 2011: 460). This vigorous enthusiasm for both contemporary and historical art had precipitated widespread changes in the structures and operations of many art markets, particularly in East Asia (Zineng 2011: 460). Since this period art markets worldwide have registered marked growth. The art market’s rapid expansion globally was tied directly to the growth in the world economy in the early years of the last few decades; its size in fact doubled between 2003 and 2006 (Hams 2013: 537). Although the art market subsequently rapidly declined in 2008 (closely paralleling the bank failures which occurred in the second half of 2008) since then it has recovered. Volumes of sales and individual sale prices have recovered far more successfully than other parts of the world economy (Hams 2013: 537). It can be argued that ‘art itself has come to be seen as a kind of gold’ (Hams 2013: 537). It is currently a secure place to store capital in times of continuing uncertainty, with the assumption that prices will not have fallen when the time comes to sell.

Although the high value of the pilgrim flask can be in part attributed to the global expansion of the East Asian art market this object also acquires value for other reasons, including the significance of this object as a rare example of fifteenth-century blue and white porcelain, alongside the high quality of the craftsmanship and materials used when creating this piece. The current museum display of the pilgrim flask to a certain extent aims to highlight that the O'Neill collection is highly valued. Although, surprisingly the museum's interpretative strategies have not included the contextual information necessary to make visitors aware of why this blue and white Ming flask is especially significant. This object is particularly valuable for a number of reasons, and has experienced multiple values throughout its life. Including its cultural value in Ming dynasty China, the social and community value of its production, its intended use value as an important but practical object in Chinese society (in both life and death) and its value as a traded and highly esteemed commodity in the West. Each of these values are all missed opportunities, which the Ulster Museum has not adequately presented in order to portray the true significance of this object.

Conclusion: The Multiple Values of the Pilgrim Flask

By exploring the pilgrim flask, it has become apparent that the collection and exchange of objects does play a vital role in our definition of cultural value (Cummings and Lewandowska 2000: 12). Finding that the value of an object shifts through time, particularly when an ordinary commodity becomes revered by a collector it takes on the value of an 'inalienable possession' (Myers 2001: 9). Therefore, the pilgrim flask has experienced both normal use value and alien use value in its lifetime. However, even though the values associated with this object have shifted over time it did not stop simultaneously being an embodiment of the culture and society which produced it, the additional significance bestowed to this object by its collector has only added to its overall value.

Within its current museum setting the multiplicity of values surrounding the pilgrim flask are not appropriately represented. As the O'Neill collection is currently unresearched, it is likely that the museum does not presently have the resources available to expand the contextual information given in this display. However, by perceiving the pilgrim flask through the context of its multiple values it becomes

representative of more than a collected object. This case study has underlined the importance of ascribing value in the generation of meaning. The social, cultural, community, spatial, symbolic and market value of the pilgrim flask are each a factor that have altered the meaning and significance of this object over time. Therefore, by incorporating each of these contexts into the museum interpretation of this object it could be better understood by visitors. On the other hand, this case study has also underlined the fact that museum interpretation strategies are always partial. By their very nature museum narratives overlook certain strands of information for the benefit of telling other strands. Like many museum objects, the pilgrim flask embodies a multitude of untold stories and therefore a variety of possibilities for future reinterpretation in a museum setting. For this reason, objects like the pilgrim flask which exemplify many layers of value, meaning, identity and significance will most likely remain in a museum collection for some time. Their vast and assorted histories allow untold opportunities for the advancement of future learning and understanding.

Object Case Study Three: Cross-Cultural Contact

Chinoiserie at the Hunt Museum

Chinoiserie as an artistic style can be understood as a material contact zone between cultures, which allows insight into intercultural dialogue between East Asia and the West. This artistic practice presents an opportunity to explore the cross-cultural encounter which occurred through the trade of material culture between China and the West; the height of this contact taking place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The passion for Chinoiserie in the West reached its pinnacle during the last imperial dynasty of China, the Qing dynasty (1644-1912), and during this period Chinoiserie had an important impact the artistic tastes of the West.

The Hunt Museum collection will be the focus of this case study, exploring three objects/sets of objects in particular; a dinner service, known as the Charlemont dinner service (see Figure 7.15 below), which was produced in China for an Irish family during the eighteenth century. A silver gilt mounted Chinese bowl belonging to the seventeenth century (see Figure 7.16 below). Also, number of eighteenth-century English and Irish delftware ceramic pieces which have been produced in a Chinese ceramic style, in particular this case study will focus on a sweetmeat set crafted in Dublin (see Figure 7.17 below). This collection contains Chinoiserie objects originating from both England and Ireland (and of course also China). Therefore, both Britain and Europe will be used as examples when exploring Western intercultural dialogue with China, and when discussing the background of Chinoiserie.

Object Case Study One previously explored the impact of Western imperial powers on the production and trade of material goods throughout East Asia, and focussed on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. China has a long history of trade relations with the West which can be classed as imperialistic. Long before nineteenth-century British imperialism in China, the Dutch held a great deal of influence over Asian trade in the seventeenth century. Prior to this, during the sixteenth century the Portuguese dominated trade between Asia and Europe, and thus had a prominent impact on the trade and production of East Asian material

culture. Therefore, imperial context undoubtedly also influenced Chinoiserie production in China.

Object Case Study Two discussed Chinese blue and white wares, especially the highly valued porcelains of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). This area also relates to Chinoiserie wares, as many such styles have undoubtedly been influenced by these earlier (Ming) ceramic designs. However, the focus of this case study will be the impact of Chinoiserie as a material commodity during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I especially focus on how this style influenced the material production of the West during this period, and consequently the cultural interaction and amalgamated identity representations which such objects now embody. Blue and white porcelain presents a prime example of how 'Chinese things have been co-opted by another culture' (Pierson 2004: 7). As such I argue that blue and white examples in the Hunt collection embody and represent both East Asian and Western culture, society and identity. In doing so this case study provides a greater understanding of the display of Chinoiserie in an Irish museum setting. Although Limerick's Hunt Museum presents authentic East Asian porcelains alongside their Western imitations, narratives surrounding the cross-cultural conditions which allowed for the production of these objects have not been fully-explored, especially in the Irish context. Therefore, this case study will emphasise a context surrounding the Hunt collection which has never before been explored in its museum setting; I argue that this narrative should be made known to the museum visitor.

Figure 7.15 Charlemont dinner service plates, Hunt Museum, Limerick (2017). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Figure 7.16 Silver-gilt mounted Chinese bowl, Hunt Museum, Limerick (2019). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Figure 7.17 Hors-d'oeuvre or sweetmeat set, Hunt Museum, Limerick (2019). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Chinoiserie in Ceramics

In Western ceramics, the presence of Chinoiserie is evident in three ways. Firstly, the manufacture of European objects that reference Chinese culture but have no authentic Chinese elements (Thomas 2015: 234). Secondly, the construction of hybrid objects containing both Chinese and European parts. And thirdly, the mounting of authentic Chinese objects in gilt bronze or silver – absorbing or combining Chinese aesthetics into Western functions (Thomas 2015: 234). What each of the processes have in common is a meeting of styles and techniques from East Asia and the West. The three objects from the Hunt Museum collection, that I explore in this case study, present examples of each of these categories. Amongst the delftware objects in the Hunt collection there are examples of the first category, which are objects that reference Chinese culture but were not made in China. An

example of the second category is the Charlemont dinner service, which embodies both Chinese and European elements in its design. An example of the third category is the silver gilt mounted Chinese bowl, which is an example of a Chinese piece that has been mounted in the West. Each of these Chinoiserie examples will next be discussed in further depth.

Westernised Artefacts: The Charlemount Dinner Service Plates

The idea of cross-cultural contact was primarily made visible through collaboratively produced objects. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, European merchants often supplied designs and models for Chinese artisans to copy and adapt to porcelain and other materials that were exported back to Europe. In these instances, such objects can be perceived as examples of 'Sino-European encounter' (Sloboda 2018: 250). The process of design and manufacture of such objects is thus a primary example of intercultural dialogue between East Asia and the West, and the finished product a material contact zone between these cultures. Of course, politically and economically this cultural encounter was not equal, with Western imperial context largely dominating the manufacture of porcelain throughout this period. However, the artistic cultural encounters which occurred produced objects which equally became symbolic of Chinese and European styles and taste. Artistically, this object was therefore an appropriation by Europe of Chinese styles, becoming an artistic embodiment of both cultures. The objects produced in this manner thus occasioned an experience of cultural contact between Chinese and European producers and consumers, the two Charlemont dinner service plates currently displayed in the Hunt Museum present such an example.

The plates were a gift to James Caulfield (1728-1799), fourth Viscount Charlemont in March 1794 (Harpur 2002: 38). Viscount Charlemont is a title in the peerage of Ireland. Caulfield was also a dedicated patron of the arts, which first led him to his encounters with East Asia. The dinner service came into his possession after aiding one William Burroughs in obtaining a post within the *East India Company* (in 1789). As a gift to his patron, James Caulfield, Burroughs commissioned this dinner service in China 'in their best Blue and White only' (Harpur 2002: 38).

The decoration of the gifted plates is made of underglaze blue on a white ground. Although at first glance the two plates appear to be in a classical blue and white Chinese ceramic style, the images they depict are actually Western social symbols. Therefore, these plates amalgamate a representation of both eighteenth-century East Asian and Western culture. They represent China in that they were produced in China using a method and style which became a prominent symbol of Chinese culture during this period. Chinese blue and white porcelain became celebrated in the West during the eighteenth century, and for this reason became symbolic of an image of China itself. As 'perhaps the most widely recognised ceramic in the world', blue and white porcelain has been 'copied in almost every other ceramic producing culture' (Pierson 2004: 7). By the eighteenth-century Chinese porcelain had a long history of fascination and absorption in the West. From the preceding century Europe had been gripped 'by a craze for the Orient and all things Chinese' (Jacobson 1993: 31). To the West, East Asia had thus become a source of 'fabulous treasure' (Jacobson 1993: 31). Chinese decorative objects therefore became an increasingly important part of the Western visual environment, arriving as imported luxuries. Contrastingly, such objects were often seen as commonplace in China, aside from Ming imperial porcelain which was equally esteemed in its country of origin.

During the eighteenth century, the presence of Chinese decoration in the West was further expanded by Chinoiserie, and by the 'absorption of certain Chinese decorative ideas into European decorative arts' (Hay 2010: 8). Through this absorption such decorative objects of the eighteenth-century China Trade became 'connective devices' and mediated an experience of cross-cultural encounter (Sloboda 2015: 248). The material culture generated by, or in this case commissioned through the China Trade did not simply reflect the conditions of that trade but also shaped and reflected Chinese and European experiences of cultural interaction. Becoming a marker of both East Asian and European identity and an embodiment of both East Asian and Western culture.

Consequently, the Hunt Museum plates equally represent eighteenth-century Ireland and its identity, as they include the badge of the Order of St Patrick and the arms of Caulfield. They therefore epitomise eighteenth-century Irish aristocratic society, during a period when social standing, rank and official titles were imperative markers

of identity and social order. The border of each plate depicts the badge and collar of the Order of St Patrick, which marks James Caulfield's role as one of its initial founding knights. The centre of each plate depicts the Caulfield family arms, with an Earl's coronet supported by two dragons. The Caulfield moto '*Deo Duce, Ferro Comitante* (God is my Leader, Sword and my Companion)' is cited underneath (Harpur 2002: 38). To the Chinese craftsmen who produced the plates these designs and symbols would have been entirely foreign and unfamiliar to them. This confirms that the materials China exported were often rather different from the decorative arts that were produced for use in late Ming (1570-1644) and early to mid-Qing (1644-1840) China (Hay 2010: 8). Decoration was consequently an important mode of communication between Chinese and European traders and craftsmen, who for the most part 'lacked a shared textual or pictorial language through which to communicate' (Sloboda 2015: 248). The geographical, social, cultural and linguistic barriers experienced were part of this cross-cultural encounter (Sloboda 2015: 249).

The decorative objects which circulated between China and the West during the eighteenth century were 'sites of contact', through which meaning was mutually created by craftsmen, traders, consumers and the material commodities themselves (Sloboda 2015: 248). As has been discovered such objects often mediated cultural encounter through their formal characteristics, which in this case comprised a traditional Chinese blue and white porcelain style, juxtaposed with Western social symbols. During the eighteenth century, the complex nature of cultural encounter between East Asia and the West was negotiated through material objects and their decorative elements. Sloboda (2015: 252) argues that decoration inks 'objects into a coherent system', as it functions as a cognitive agent between the objects and those who use them. In this case catering the plates to Western tastes, specifically as a marker of James Caulfield's identity since he was the intended user. Eighteenth-century Chinese decorative objects were perceived to be a luxury item, regardless of the symbols depicted, the plates would therefore have immediately advertised the status of their owner (Hay 2010: 21). In this way decoration became an active reinforcement of the owner's social standing and identity, becoming an embodiment of both the Chinese society which produced them and also the Western society which amalgamated them into everyday life. Chinoiserie is therefore an especially powerful and resonant 'connective agent' (Sloboda 2015: 254).

Hybrid Artefact: The Silver-Gilt Mounted Chinese Bowl

Another artefact of interest in the Hunt collection is a seventeenth-century silver-gilt mounted Chinese bowl. Generally, mounted ceramics have received very little attention in academic enquiry, with the exception of Kristel Smentek (2015) who uses this area as a focus in her research practice. Otherwise, in the surrounding literature the practice of mounting is often only touched on briefly in a discussion of ceramics more broadly (Pierson 2012, 2013), or in a general investigation of Chinoiserie (Sloboda 2015, 2018). Mounted Chinese ceramic wares have a long history in the West with the earliest known piece originating in sixteenth-century England (Canepa 2016: 213).

The mounted bowl in the Hunt Museum provides an entirely different example of Chinoiserie from the plates previously discussed. Through this object a story of the export and journey of Chinese porcelain from East Asia to the West and its amalgamation into Western society can be told. Through both its physical and symbolic passing from East Asia to the West, this object is a contact zone between cultures, and a reflection of both Chinese and European identity. As a whole, Chinese imports can be regarded as primary sites of cultural contact (Smentek 2015: 43). This became cultural transformation when the imported objects began their new purpose in Western society, altered exclusively for Western use. In this case, like many other objects which reached Europe, the bowl has been altered through the process of mounting. Mounting Chinese porcelain was initially a French practice, reaching its peak throughout the whole of Europe during the eighteenth-century (Smentek 2015: 45). As the bowl is thought to belong to the seventeenth seventeenth century, it predates this period and belongs to a batch of porcelains mounted by select collectors, consumers, and wealthy Western merchants before this process became commonplace.

This bowl was produced and mounted during the pinnacle of Western taste for Chinoiserie, when this style was extremely fashionable and expensive in the West. The mounted bowl is made from porcelain, ‘a mixture of kaolin and china stone’ (O’Nolan 2002: 52). The decoration on the bowl is cobalt underglaze; the panels depict flying horse motifs and flowers. Inside the bowl a separate design has been

included, that of a landscape scene. On closer inspection, it is evident that the bowl has been broken and poorly repaired at some stage during the course of its life history. This is not an uncommon trait of the Hunt collection objects, as it has been widely documented that the objects collected by the Hunt family were often used on an everyday basis by the family, therefore objects collected by the Hunt family were seen to be everyday objects of use rather than objects of economic/market value, consequently many objects in the collection were broken or damaged as a result of prolonged use by the family. On the open market, such blue and white porcelain bowls are valuable, justifying their repair. In regard to this ceramic bowl in particular, objects of this style have been (and remain) highly prized in Western society. It is reputed by the Hunt Museum that Queen Elizabeth I gifted a similar bowl to her godchild Sir Francis Walsingham, which now resides in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. This suggests that Chinese porcelain pieces, with supplementary European silver-gilt mounts, were extremely fashionable for the ruling classes of Elizabethan England (O'Nolan 2002: 52). The decoration of masks and caryatids in the added mounts, as can be observed on the Hunt collection bowl, was first introduced in the drawings of German artist Hans Holbein the Younger (1497-1543) (O'Nolan 2002: 52), a German painter and printmaker resident in the Tudor court. This is therefore a style of mount which can be seen on many of the earlier (pre-eighteenth-century) pieces; the hallmark on this exact piece was too faint to be read.

The process of mounting ceramic objects is a form of cultural transformation, as it negotiates 'difference rather than a denigration or subjection of it' (Smentek 2015: 45). By mounting unfamiliar objects Western consumers and craftsmen transformed these objects into familiar shapes, with purposes which were recognisable. Therefore, during this era mounting was a popular approach primarily because 'there was still some confusion about the nature of the material itself' (Pierson 2012: 17). In this way mounting negotiates difference, changing the appearance of the objects in a way which allows both their original forms and altered states to be perceivable. Through the process of mounting, the bowl at the Hunt Museum has been given two handles and a stand, making it more accessible for use in Western society. In Western culture this bowl therefore became a vessel for tea drinking, with handles to pick up the bowl and a silver base which allowed it to be placed on a table. This contradicts entirely its function in Chinese society where it would have been picked

up and used directly without handles. Such transformations have been interpreted by some as disfigurations, that represent Europe's lack of appreciation of Asian art and culture (Smentek 2015: 44-45). On the other hand, the practice of mounting Chinese porcelain can also be interpreted as an act which added value to the objects in Western culture, by in a sense framing them (Smentek 2015: 45; Grasskamp 2015). Similarly, this process can be argued to be neither a disfiguration nor an improvement, but rather a process of cultural and social appropriation. By altering the bowl for use in European civilization it has changed its meaning, value and significance, from an object which primarily reflected Chinese identity and cultural value to an object which has been given a new life and purpose in Western society. Thus, the object becomes an equal reflection of both Chinese and European identity, culture and society. It is therefore a practice which foregrounds the role of materiality in mediating cultural exchange (Smentek 2015: 45).

The transfer or translation of material culture from one context to another often results in its alteration and modification. The modification of objects from their East Asian origins to a Western rendition of them has most widely occurred through the medium of porcelain. Although Chinoiserie appears in a wide variety of materials it is most known in its application to ceramics, in particular to porcelain (Sloboda 2018: 143). The gilded mounts provided both protection for fragile porcelain and adornment to 'special porcelain pieces' (O'Nolan 2002: 52). Similar to picture frames which ornamented valued European paintings of this period, metal mounts 'drew attention to the porcelain' and promoted the viewers 'sensuous engagement with its visual and tactile qualities' (Smentek 2015: 45). From this viewpoint, the mounts can be perceived as something which draws out the visual decoration of the objects and promotes an aesthetic appreciation of them. It has been argued that the silver-gilt or gilt-bronze ornamentation added to Chinese porcelains visually enhanced them, as 'the reflection of the gilt bronze in the glaze heightened the visual effect of lustre' (Smentek 2015: 49). On the other hand, mounting porcelain can also be perceived as a form of ornamentation which visually alters objects which are 'aesthetically lacking' and therefore require 'compensation' (Smentek 2015: 45).

The answer to these contradictory viewpoints appears to be found by considering the historical time frame and the changing Western perceptions of East Asia throughout

the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries. The seventeenth-century can be perceived as an era throughout which a passion for Chinoiserie emerged and was sustained. During this time China was idealised in the Western imagination as somewhere with impeccable artistic talent. However, from the mid-eighteenth century onwards a variety of contradictory views were produced in the West about China. Towards the end of the eighteenth-century the balance between positive and negative images shifted decisively away from the former towards the latter (Thomas 2015: 234). Parallel to Western perceptions of East Asia, throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, mounted porcelains were most likely perceived as objects which were only slightly enhanced by metal mounts. As extremely valuable and highly appreciated wares themselves, the mounts were seen to intensify or heighten the already existing aesthetic qualities of the objects. During the late-eighteenth- and following nineteenth-century, a period when positive perceptions of Chinese culture were waning, mounts were instead perceived as something which improved the imported porcelain. It is during this stage that metal mounts were seen as advancements of the aesthetic qualities which the objects possessed, bettering them and bestowing them with a greater visual appeal. Equally, the contradictory views of mounted ceramics were also a reflection of Western contradictory views of East Asia during the mid-eighteenth-century.

Regardless of whether mounting is perceived to have a positive or negative effect on the object, it undoubtedly reflects the value of imported porcelain as a costly, luxury item during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Whatever one's viewpoint, mounting is seen as something which draws attention to the materiality of porcelain, 'to its enigmatic medium and glazes' (Smentek 2015: 49). Likewise, encasing porcelain wares in metal frames is undeniably also a form of subjection to a foreign aesthetic and to Western taste. As by doing so the objects are transformed by Western taste and values, into objects which are more useful and aesthetically pleasing to European tastes. In this sense, these Chinese made objects have become a reflection of Western values, tastes and principles. In many ways, mounted wares have been adapted for the pleasure and preference of Europeans. However, this does not stop them from embodying and symbolising the culture which they originated from prior to being mounted. Taken as a whole, mounted Chinese wares can thus be seen as an embodiment of both Chinese culture and identity and

that of Europe, with a predominant visual marker of the physical transition of these objects from one society into another. As these objects changed cultural ownership their uses, significance and visual appearance likewise also changed. It is unusual for an item of material culture to both symbolically and physically portray its changing meanings, uses and values over time. Consequently, mounted Chinese ceramic wares have become primary visual markers of cultural encounter between East Asia and the West.

Imitation Artefact: The Sweetmeat Set

The Hunt Museum also displays a variety of delftware objects which were produced in Dublin, but exemplify a Chinese ceramic style. The object which I now discuss is a hors-d'oeuvre, also known as a sweetmeat set. The style and design of this object is undeniably related to authentic Chinese porcelain. In fact, a sweetmeat box which holds aesthetic similarities in its shape and form is displayed in the National Museum of Ireland, within the *Albert Bender Collection of Asian Art* (see Figure 7.18 below). The NMI artefact originated in eighteenth-century China, around the same time the Hunt Museum's Irish replica was made (1760-70), and links visually with the Hunt Museum piece. Although there is a connection in time period and aesthetic form, the most important feature is perhaps that one object is of European origin and the other Chinese. These objects therefore exemplify the divergent characteristics which distinguish East Asian and Western styles and production methods. However, as the focus of this case study is Chinoiserie and the cultural encounter which it can be seen to embody, only the Hunt Museum example will be explored in depth. It is nevertheless interesting to note that there exists crossover in objects within the East Asian collections in Ireland, corresponding with the overlap in objects manufactured and traded in East Asia and the West during this time.

Figure 7.18 Sweetmeat box within the *Albert Bender Collection of Asian Art*, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin (2019). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

A sweetmeat set typically consists of five small interlocking dishes in a larger tray. These would have been used to serve portions of sauces, pickles or condiments. They are comparatively common in eighteenth-century Chinese and English porcelain, but are rarely found in delftware (Francis 2000: 63). Such sets most likely formed part of an entire dinner set. The sweetmeat set at the Hunt collection was manufactured in Dublin in a pottery originally established by John Chambers. Later, in 1752 Henry Delamain took over and made sizeable investments in the factory (The British Museum 2019), and it was during this period that the Hunt set was produced. This Irish delftware represented the growing decorum of eighteenth-century Ireland. Its presence on an aristocratic dining table demonstrates that 'meals, manners and table etiquette became increasingly sophisticated in affluent

Irish homes' (Francis 2000: 63). During the eighteenth-century, almost indistinguishable sweetmeat sets were being produced in Liverpool delftware. Unlike the Liverpool examples however, these dishes hold a characteristic distinctive to Dublin, a painter's number on the base of each (Francis 2000: 63). As each of these dishes have the number two on their base, it is likely that they were each completed by the same painter.

The Hunt Museum sweetmeat set, like many of the Liverpool delftware examples, was decorated with a painted floral design known as 'the flower spray and ribbon' pattern, this was most likely 'copied from Chinese porcelain of the 1760s' (Francis 2000: 63). Chinese flower patterns 'are amongst the most influential designs in the world' (Rawson 1984: 11). The first stages of development of these motifs were found in remote areas of China, primarily carved in 'Buddhist cave temples of the late fifth-century AD' (Francis 2000: 11). The translation of these designs into Western ceramic replicas is a result of the admiration felt for Chinese porcelain in the West during this period (Francis 2000: 11), rather than an appreciation of the aesthetic appeal or symbolism of the designs themselves.

Delftware emerged as a result of Western demand. Despite the staggering quantities of porcelain which reached Europe during the eighteenth-century, Chinese porcelain remained a luxury out of the reach of many. The relative inaccessibility of porcelain fuelled 'a mythology of Chinese mastery and exoticism' in the West (Degenhardt 2013: 134). This exoticism reflects Western 'Orientalist' discourses of East Asia. In the West attempts were thus made to copy these ceramic wares, although the technical qualities of porcelain continued to be difficult for the West to reproduce. These attempts at replication were found in delftware factories across Holland, England and as in this case Dublin.

The encounter between China and the West during the eighteenth century was therefore largely a material one, affected by the objects of commercial and diplomatic trade. Traded porcelains thus became primary sites of cultural contact. As the sweetmeat set demonstrates, many new items were manufactured in response to them. Consequently, Chinese porcelain became a fundamental way of 'examining the processes by which otherness was engaged' (Smentek 2015: 43-44) in the West.

Consequently, delftware porcelain replicas can not only be seen as sites of cultural contact, but also as sites where cultural difference was investigated. By aiming to produce similar wares, Western delftware factories literally and symbolically dissected the 'Cultural Other' (which in this case was a porcelain vessel), as a method of discovering how it differed from materials familiar to the West in an effort to replicate it. Accordingly, when material culture shifts across cultural boundaries from one context to another 'surprising cross-fertilizations are revealed' (Roberts and Hackforth-Jones 2005: 1). In this case these connections exist through a material object: the delftware reproduction.

As indicated previously, the blue and white design of the sweetmeat recalls one of the most popular types of Ming (1368-1644) ceramics in Europe (discussed in Object Case Study Two). Of the millions of porcelains exported to the West from China between the fifteenth century and the twentieth century, the vast majority of these were painted with designs of blue and white. This style of ceramics has subsequently become a symbol of China in Western discourse, with such objects bestowed the name china in the English language. Examples of blue and white ceramics of various worth exist in each of the four East Asian collections examined in this study; ranging from highly valued official Ming wares in the Ulster Museum collection (Object Case Study Two), to the delftware currently being explored in the Hunt Museum collection which can be considered of a lesser economic value. In each case these objects were amassed during the early twentieth century, despite their emergence in the Western market four centuries prior, displaying the longstanding appeal such objects held for collectors of East Asian material.

The blue and white decoration of the Hunt Museum's sweetmeat set is therefore perhaps its most significant feature. Intercultural dialogue between East Asia and the West was formed through the amalgamation of this East Asian design into Western taste and culture. The blue and white styles of China Trade porcelain had a significant influence on the eighteenth-century delftware industry, and from this perspective can be perceived as a design which was as typical to and symbolic of the West as it was China.

The blue and white style was produced so vastly in the West and displayed so widely throughout British and European homes that the Chinese origins of this style can at times be overlooked. Blue and white ceramic designs reflect Western identity, style, taste and culture during the eighteenth century. However, this design also undoubtedly encapsulates its wider context in East Asia, becoming a symbol of culture and identity which can be perceived differently in different cultural contexts. Accordingly, the changing significance of the blue and white design makes it a predominant marker of cross-cultural identity, displaying how one single design can encapsulate many identities and meanings, changing as it changes ownership and cultural context. The deep influence East Asian porcelain had on European ceramics (primarily the delftware industry) is therefore of paramount importance to understanding cultural encounter and intercultural dialogue between East Asia and the West. However, there is no doubt that the blue and white design developed an entirely different meaning in the West. The question that remains is whether this Western blue and white design with an altered meaning and significance to its East Asian counterpart, simply provides a translation or appropriation of this design into European taste, or if it represents something altogether different.

Authenticity Challenges

Through my observations of the Hunt Museum it is clear that a choice has been made to display Chinoiserie items alongside genuine porcelains originating from China (see Figure 7.19 below). The effect of this being that the viewer is not completely aware that the Chinoiserie pieces are directly derivative of the Chinese (or what was perceived as Chinese) wares. The proximity between Chinese wares and their Western adaptations raises questions about the authenticity of the former. For example, it is not directly apparent which pieces originated in the West and which in East Asia upon initially observing the display. Of course, Chinoiserie pieces, such as those in the Hunt Museum, hold value and significance in their representation of Western craftsmanship in a prominent period. However, at the time of their production they were undeniably considered a cheaper and more attainable imitation of expensive Chinese wares.

Figure 7.19 Current display of the Hunt Museum's ceramic collection, Hunt Museum, Limerick (2017). Photograph by Stephanie Harper.

Authenticity can be perceived as a 'judgement or value placed on what is assessed' (Brida, Disengna and Scuderi 2012: 519). For Chinese ceramics in particular, Pierson (2019: 13) argues that the study of fakes is 'really a study of authenticity and its meanings in particular contexts', considering that in Chinese porcelain the fake is 'both a design phenomenon and a form of cultural practice'. This is due to the fact that replica or reproduction Chinese ceramics have an extensive history in both East Asia and the West, and unlike replicas in any other art form (namely painting and fine art practices), Chinese ceramic replicas are highly collectable and often highly valued. Therefore, the concept of authenticity is particularly complex in regard to Chinese ceramics within East Asian culture, as this genre does not follow conventional trends for inauthentic or fake objects.

The idea of authenticity is often raised with regard to museum collections more broadly (especially those which are man-made). Objects of natural history can be considered authentic by virtue of their origin in nature, contrasting to the questionable authenticity of many objects arising from an ‘intentional manufacturing process’ (Bunce 2016: 230). Man-made objects are generally seen to be authentic if they are an original (not a replica or fake), or if they embody a historic link to a person, place or event (Bunce 2016: 230). It therefore becomes evident that Chinoiserie pieces, which can be seen as both imitations of Chinese wares and also as examples of original Western ware, belong to a delicate middle ground between fake and authentic. Accordingly, authenticity is not a ‘tangible asset’ (Brida, Disengna and Scuderi 2012: 519). Comparable to the Chinoiserie pieces themselves, authenticity is thus multidimensional and in a constant state of flux.

Authenticity has become an important attribute of the museum visitor experience. Generally, objects displayed in museums and the information provided by these objects (including museum interpretations and narratives) are thought by visitors to be genuine. Therefore, even if an object in a museum collection is a replica, the museum still can potentially generate an authentic experience of it (Brida, Disengna and Scuderi 2012: 522). Failure by museum visitors in appreciating the authenticity of objects in a display may ‘undermine not only the aesthetic value of museum visits but also interfere with potential educational gains’ (Bunce 2016: 230). Accordingly, the authenticity of a museum experience is dependent on a number of attributes, including ‘the type of exhibition, the exposition of the materials, its building and the feelings it may transmit during the visit’ (Brida, Disengna and Scuderi 2012: 522). Perhaps the most significant attribute however remains to be the presentation of the objects. The Hunt Museum has presented its ceramic collection in a display cabinet alongside text panels and labels containing factual information about both the Hunt family and about individual objects. This portrays the objects as significant enough to be safeguarded and protected for future generations, and also as interesting enough for their historical information to be recorded and communicated.

Museums are beginning to move away from the notion that ‘authentic objects speak for themselves’ (Bunce 2016: 237). As museums embrace ‘object based discourse’ (Bunce 2016: 237) the design of a museum display is important in the creation of an

authentic experience. In such a discourse, the authenticity of an object is created through interaction between the object, the exhibition and the visitor. Bunce (2016: 236) provides initial evidence to support the belief that authentic objects as opposed to replicas 'promote curiosity and engagement'. It can therefore be assumed that the museum visitor's perception of authenticity is directly related to the engagement they will have with an object.

Authenticity, Interpretation and Representation: The Hunt Museum Display

The amalgamated display of East Asian and Western ceramic objects presented by the Hunt Museum may also have implications for the identities and cultures which these objects are seen to represent and symbolise. Today's Western museum spaces should be perceived as 'contact zones', thus as 'sources of knowledge and as catalysts for new relationships both within and between communities' (Peers and Brown 2003: 5). As sites of intersecting histories museum objects often hold multiple meanings for museums and source communities, tending to be understood very differently by each group (Peers and Brown 2003: 5). Consequently, culture is considered to be 'one of the most difficult concepts in the human and social sciences' as there always exists more than one way of defining it (Hall 1997: 2). When interpreting and displaying museum objects, museum professionals are therefore assigned the task of deciding which cultures (and subsequently identities) will be most prominently represented in their exhibitions. This is achieved by selecting narratives and aspects of the objects histories to be brought to the forefront of interpretative strategies. For the Hunt Museum in particular, the narrative of the ceramic display does not adequately represent the cultural context of these objects. The interpretations presented by the Hunt Museum prominently represent the Hunt family, therefore current interpretations overlook the East Asian cultural context and identity which these objects equally represent.

In order to face challenges surrounding the inadequate representation of cultures and the inappropriate provision for the needs of culturally diverse communities, changes to museum functions and practices are 'indispensable' (Simpson 2001: 1). The multicultural nature of contemporary society has therefore brought additional pressures to bear on how museum objects are interpreted and displayed, and most significantly on which identities and communities they are seen to represent. A way

forward for the Hunt Museum could be to redisplay its ceramic collection thematically. Presenting the objects alongside text panels and labels which draw out the multiple contexts which the objects embody, much like the display strategy implemented by the Chester Beatty Library for the snuff bottles in the Beatty collection (see Object Case Study One). This would enable the Chinoiserie objects to represent both the Western culture which consumed them alongside East Asian culture which inspired their design. In this sense, the objects could adequately represent the East Asian culture which they are so deeply connected to while still retaining their context to collector John Hunt.

This case study has highlighted that the Hunt Museum's ceramic collection undoubtedly embodies both East Asian and Western culture, identity and history; even though each of these strands are not adequately represented in current museum display strategies. Each of the ceramic objects discussed symbolise some sort of cultural origin in East Asia alongside their amalgamation into Western society and culture, and subsequently their collection by John Hunt. However, these distinctions become even more complex as many of these objects, predominantly the Western blue and white wares, represent Chinese culture at a time when it was stereotyped and commodified as a fashionable and tradable product in the West. The discrepancies between the East Asian and Western cultural identities portrayed through Chinoiserie objects therefore become obscured. Chinese porcelain goods sold to the West were gradually incorporated into Western culture and style. At the same time, the Chinese identities and cultures embodied in these objects increasingly became suited to and reflective of the Western culture which consumed them rather than the East Asian culture which produced them. Accordingly, the case of Chinese and Western imitation blue and white wares demonstrates that 'even the most mundane objects can be endowed with value and thus be transformed into a vehicle of contested meaning' (Lidchi 1997: 155). It is our use of things, 'what we say, think and feel about them; how we represent them' (Hall 1997: 3) that bestows them with meaning.

The ways in which objects are selected, put together and written or spoken about in museums often have adverse effects for the communities to which they are connected but do not appropriately represent (Sandell 2002: 8). In this case, the

Hunt Museum display has largely been disconnected from the East Asian culture of its origin. With minimal interpretative aids (the labels previously discussed) the display of the Hunt Museum's ceramic collection becomes merged within the overriding master narrative of the museum: that of the Hunt family. The museum presents a minimal amount of information regarding each of the objects on display, irrespective of their cultural backgrounds and origin. This is insufficient because failing to highlight the cultural origins of objects which did not originate in Ireland causes the complexity of these objects to be overlooked. In doing so the cultures, identities and histories embodied within these objects may be misunderstood by the museum visitor. At the Hunt Museum, there is limited information relating these objects to their cultural origins and histories, overlooking their complex backgrounds as export commodities which travelled from East Asia to the West. By presenting the objects with minimal context as ceramic wares which are aesthetically pleasing, the museum visitor will instead understand them purely in terms of their aesthetic qualities.

Furthermore, the very act of displaying objects which originated in China alongside objects native to Ireland (the sweetmeat set) in an Irish institution, may very well strip them of their association with Chinese culture and identity. In the display of this collection the Hunt Museum has chosen to present foreign objects alongside objects familiar to the home market. Therefore, while this display potentially has the ability to be utilised to promote inclusively and represent its connections to East Asia, the museum is yet to undertake such practice. Moreover, the very position of these objects in a museum dedicated to the life and collection of John Hunt (and his wife) highlights the connection these objects hold to this prominent individual beyond all others.

Conclusion: The Identity of Chinoiserie

The Hunt Museum's display of Chinoiserie directly alongside cultural artefacts originating from China presents challenges, as it poses questions surrounding the authenticity of the displayed objects. This is an important collection in the museum, it is a material embodiment of a significant period in the history of China's trade relations with the West, symbolising a material contact zone between cultures. The

Chinoiserie in the Hunt collection highlights the cultural encounter which occurred between East Asia and the West during the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries, becoming a representation of both Western craftsmanship, and of the East Asian cultural practices which greatly motivated this Western style in the first place. The presence of Chinoiserie thus allows this cross-cultural contact to become physically anchored to a solid material commodity.

There is a tendency for the East Asian cultural origins of Western Chinoiserie ceramics to be overlooked. The Hunt Museum's current display is no exception, as mentioned it does not adequately represent the East Asian origins of Chinoiserie styles and designs. Chinoiserie itself can be argued to be an assertion of 'Western cultural superiority' (Smentek 2015: 45). As it references a symbolic image of China which was often misappropriated, and understood as 'a reductive, fashionable and superficial exoticism' (Smentek 2015: 45). The result of this (as noted in Chapter Two), is that genuine Chinese ceramics are often treated as 'honorary British objects, with little consciousness of the cultural context from which they sprang' (Clunas 1997: 12). Chinoiserie objects have therefore in many cases, been enveloped into Western culture. Accordingly, the display strategies implemented by the Hunt Museum have entangled the East Asian and Western histories of these Chinoiserie objects, posing challenges for the identities which these objects can be seen to represent. In today's societies, museums provide a setting for the construction and definition of identity (Karp 1992: 19). Although, the ways in which identities are defined by museums often contradict the 'official definitions of a social groups' identity' (Karp 1992: 20). Museums therefore need to consider history to be a living part of people's sense of who they are (Kreamer 1992: 367). Appropriately representing identities in museum exhibitions is thus no easy task. Regardless, museums are increasingly asked to ensure that their exhibitions resonate with contemporary issues and present-day realities (Kreamer 1992: 370). There always exists more than one way of thinking about objects, particularly in regard to identity representations, and thus more than one way of interpreting or representing the past (Hall 1997: 2).

The current display of the Hunt Museum's ceramic collection, although left somewhat open to the interpretations of individuals, would benefit from a revision of its display

strategies. As mentioned, by redisplaying this collection thematically, the objects would have an opportunity to represent the multitude of diverse contexts which they embody. In a diverse Ireland, the collection has the opportunity to communicate important messages surrounding relations between East Asia and the West, power and colonisation, Ireland's connections with East Asia through eighteenth-century trade, ethnicity and cross-cultural relations. As previously outlined in Object Case Study One through a discussion of the British Museum's *Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery*, thematic displays present an opportunity for the portrayal of divergent themes and topics, thus illustrating a diversity of cultural contexts and identity representations.

If the museum's curators were to consider the possible effects of the Hunt display on identity construction and on the representation of both East Asian and Western culture and history, the exhibit could conceivably be used more effectively to foster relations between communities. However, the Hunt Museum primarily focusses on medieval artefacts, as this area was collector John Hunt's specialisation. Therefore, it is probable that the museum lacks the resources and specialist staff necessary to place further emphasis on the display of this ceramic collection. A simpler strategy would be to make a clear distinction between the Western Chinoiserie objects on display and cultural artefacts originating from the East Asia. This could be achieved by updating the labels incorporated in this display, or by clustering objects together in the display case, drawing attention to the different types of ceramics within this display and the diversity of cultures which they represent. By doing so a distinction between East Asian and Western made ceramics could be appreciated. Updating the display in this way would foster learning and engagement, allowing visitors to clearly decipher the distinctions between Chinese porcelains and those which were imitated by Western craftsmen. Highlighting for visitors the impact and appeal East Asian ceramics held for Western consumers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and better representing the complexity of Chinoiserie ceramics as objects which embody both East Asian and Western society, history, identity and culture.

Chapter Seven Conclusion

By investigating individual objects from the Albert Bender (National Museum of Ireland), Chester Beatty (Chester Beatty Library), Con O'Neill (Ulster Museum), and

John Hunt (Hunt Museum) collections Chapter Seven has highlighted contextual and/or historical narratives or frameworks for understanding that are currently excluded from museum interpretation strategies. In doing so this chapter has advanced a contextual understanding of these collections, moving away from the biographical account of the collector's lives which is the current focus of museum narration strategies.

Object Case Study One found that the Japanese netsuke and Chinese snuff bottles in the Beatty and Bender collections are representational of more than what their current display narratives portray. These objects do not simply indicate a single point in history, but rather experience changing and divergent contexts throughout their pasts, present existence and future realities. Colonial and imperial powers may have impacted the meaning and significance of these objects, as did the East Asian craftsmen who fashioned the objects, the art dealers who traded them in the West, the collectors who gathered and accumulated the objects, the curators who had/currently have a say in the display and interpretation of the objects and any other individuals who may have come into contact with them throughout their lifetimes for a wide diversity of reasons. By excluding many of these narratives from the current displays, the interpretations of the objects have become simplified, with much of their complexity removed. By more readily presenting a diversity of contexts in the displays, these objects could be appreciated in an entirely different light. Presenting further information and other frameworks of interpretation on the background of these objects, and how and why they were made, used and then collected, would also enable them to more inclusively represent the diverse identity relations and cultural contexts which they have embodied throughout their existence, rather than allowing the focus to be the identity and context of their Western collector.

Through an exploration of the Chinese pilgrim flask in the Ulster Museum collection, Object Case Study Two has advanced an understanding of the various discursive frameworks in effect, surrounding both the society represented and also the society doing the representing (Lidchi 1997: 151). Particularly regarding how this object has been valued throughout its existence, as value has been attributed to the pilgrim flask for a variety of reasons throughout its lifetime. This exploration has allowed

insight into how the pilgrim flask has been valued in today's society as a rare example of fifteenth-century porcelain, and at the time of its production as a valuable piece of imperial porcelain made at Jingdezhen. As this East Asian object was seen to be a significant enough commodity to journey back to the West with diplomat O'Neill, it can also be argued that this adds to its value. Certainly, in the mid-twentieth century when this object was collected East Asian porcelain was still highly valued in the West. When this object was purchased and collected by O'Neill it equally became a reflection of his own personal life and identity, alongside becoming a reflection of Western culture and society as a whole, which at this time had been fascinated by such objects for decades.

Through an exploration of three Chinoiserie objects in the Hunt Museum collection, Object Case Study Three uncovered that Chinoiserie has become a physical representation of a complex cultural encounter between two worlds, during a period when perceptions and presumptions were uncertain and continually evolving. Accordingly, this case study has discovered that gilt mounted ceramics subsequently became a physical representation of the merging of two cultural identities. Likewise, delftware and Chinese porcelains commissioned by the West equally have come to represent a material encounter between two societies, encapsulating the identities, tastes, cultures and experiences of each. Chinoiserie therefore holds the ability to symbolically contain and communicate information, in this case regarding a complicated period in the history of China and the West.

Chapter Eight

Conclusions on the Future of East Asian Collections in Ireland

This thesis has revealed that collections remain an important factor in the impact of and meaning that can be made through museums today. Contrary to an emerging field of museum studies literature which supports the declining significance of the physical object in a 'digital age' (Conn 2010; Parry 2010; Bautista 2013; Geismar 2018; Giannini and Bowen 2019), this study instead supports the idea that tangible collections remain of the utmost importance. I have placed focus on collections as reflective of identity and society more broadly alongside the enhancement of cultural understanding and building relations between East Asia and the West. Despite a conscious shift towards multiplicity and inclusivity in contemporary museum practice, the museum space largely remains an environment which produces and narrates selective knowledge constructions to an audience. In today's complex and changing societies the contexts of display and narration practices are also evolving. This study has identified the various steps that museums are currently taking or not to become inclusive and representative spaces with a specific focus on the Hunt Museum, the Chester Beatty Library, the Ulster Museum and the National Museum of Ireland. I now conclude the thesis by identifying the significance of the research findings.

I opened this thesis with a discussion of the four key strands that have underpinned the entire research: East Asian collections in Ireland, relations between East Asia and the West, museums and identity, and museum narrative (Chapter Two). Arising from these areas are the themes of knowledge and power, museum display, interpretation, collection, classification, representation, perception, museum education and museum functions. In answering the objectives set out by this project, much crossover appears, with many of these themes occurring repeatedly in conclusions, reinstating their importance in the associated areas of museum theory and practice. In concluding the study, this chapter now focusses upon the findings as they relate to the overall objectives of this thesis (see Table 8.1 below). Namely:

Table 8.1 Research Objectives

Research objective one	**Visitor perception**	Audience engagement and identity construction through museum objects
Research objective two	**Display approaches**	Functions, uses and challenges surrounding the collections
Research objective three	**Interpretative approaches**	Understanding museum narrative
Research objective four	**Understanding display**	Advancing the inclusion of multiple stories

The success of the multiplicity of this research demonstrates the undoubtable advantages of incorporating a multidisciplinary approach. Exhibition making itself is collaborative in nature, therefore exhibition analysis and the study of museum collections is also enhanced by implementing a collaborative (multidisciplinary) approach. This project has utilised interdisciplinary methodologies between three distinct disciplines: museum studies, cultural sociology and art history (see Chapter One). Implementing a multidisciplinary approach has allowed exhibition narratives to be explored from a variety of different perspectives: including textual, visual and theoretical. Also from a variety of divergent vantage points, exploring both the wider exhibition narratives (meta-narratives), and also the individual histories and contexts embodied by objects. Applying this approach to museum practice and incorporating new multi-layered and inclusive tactics of interpretation, narration and display could therefore bring about positive change in the museum space, advancing a greater awareness of the multitude of narratives surrounding any one museum collection.

Visitor Perceptions: Audience Engagement and Identity Construction through Museum Objects (Research Objective One)

In each of the case studies discussed the collections placed on display formed the primary encounter between museum visitors and East Asian history. It is through

each of the individual objects presented that representations and identity relations are instigated. From this perspective, objects play a crucial role in museum practices. My observations indicated that objects determine not only the narratives and understandings grasped through a museum display but also the relationships, connections and identity constructions built subsequent to that initial experience. Of course, the historical, cultural, political and social narratives drawn out from the objects through display strategies are central in determining how the objects will be perceived, understood and recalled by the museum visitor. Nevertheless, the objects themselves determine the multiplicity of contexts available to interpretative strategies. Awarding greater attention to the study of objects opens up wider accessibility of interpretative opportunities.

Chapter Seven specifically focussed on the objects in the collections which I investigated. This developed a further understanding of each display, by approaching them through the perspective of the objects they hold. The object contexts explored included collection approaches, multiple values and cross-cultural contact. Through this exploration the storylines and identity representations which are currently being disregarded in current displays became evident. It was found that the East Asian objects held in Irish museums are complex symbols, representing many narratives and identities which until now were not sufficiently considered. The display narratives presented only ever exemplified a small proportion of the overall storylines and identity representations embodied by the collections; as was evident in all of the museums I investigated.

Through the display of museum collections, a multitude of identity representations regarding certain objects are often overlooked, in favour of constructing display and conservation strategies. I particularly noticed that in a collection, the symbolic nature of each object combines with the other objects in the collection. This amalgamated or collective context represents the wider collection of objects, and as was found in the case studies explored, the biography of each of the collectors. Each of the objects in the collections therefore may appear similar, in regard to assemblage, cultural origin and journey from East Asia to the West. Museums consequently might be criticised for utilising collections as collective emblems, which share (to some extent) a common history, identity and context. I argue that in becoming part of a

collection the distinctiveness of the object is largely stripped away. It no longer assumes its own identity, but instead assumes a collective identity alongside the other objects in the collection as identified during my fieldwork.

In three out of the four case studies examined, the identity constructions presented by the collections were predominantly fashioned by museum curators. The challenge of identity representation is therefore both 'demanding' and 'potentially troublesome' for museums (Watson 2007: 57). As found in Chapter Two, this is primarily because it is difficult for the curator who is a member of one social group, to overlook their own set of values and interpret another culture without projecting their own principles and ideals (Watson 2007: 57). Consequently, all practices that produce object meaning involve relations of power; including the power to define which histories, identities and representations will be incorporated and which overlooked in museum displays. However, curators are not the only stakeholders responsible for the construction of knowledge and identity in the museum space (Gray 2015: 153). Local groups (pressure, interest and community) also play a significant role in the interpretation of cultural objects. Such groups hold a claim to certain identity constructions presented by objects, in most cases because they feel these representations are in line with their own identities or that of their community.

For instance, as revealed at the Hunt Museum, particularly through the interviews conducted at this site, it became evident that groups of volunteers (referred to at the museum as docents) were key stakeholders. The primary method in which visitors to the Hunt Museum engaged with and learnt about the East Asian ceramic collection, was through the guided tour programme. This programme is entirely docent-led and driven, each docent presenting the museum from their own perspective. Museum docents each tell the story of the Hunt Museum and its collections in their own individual ways, they also select which objects they highlight to suit the interests of each tour group. Each tour is unique and no two tours will ever provide an identical experience of the museum. As a result, the objects and their histories were depicted very differently to each individual visitor. In this case the knowledge constructions presented through the objects are directly related to the knowledge and identity of the tour guide. The consequence being that each visitor or group of visitors departs

with a very individual experience and understanding of the collection, leading to a vast diversity of interpretative possibilities.

Another finding is that the different uses of text in the displays holds a direct correlation to how the objects are perceived. Less textual information encouraged greater inventiveness in constructing diverse, personally motivated meanings for the objects. In some cases, excessive amounts of text in the display made it primarily didactic in meaning, thus the objects own agency can at times be lost. At the Hunt Museum and Ulster Museum collections, it became apparent that when objects were presented alongside minimal contextual information the objects began to hold a new significance. In these cases, the objects were stimulating not only for their context and history but also for their aesthetic appearance and the symbolic connections they hold through their appearance. Objects thus have 'potential for value and significance in their own right', regardless of the information presented on their past function and history (Dudley 2009: 4). Equally interesting, is that when removed from contextual narratives, museum objects still, to some extent, embody and represent identity. As in all museum environments, objects prompt 'emotional engagement' with the visitor (Dudley 2009: 4). From this perspective, it seems palpable that objects should form the fundamental building block of the visitor experience, as they prompt engagement regardless of context.

How museum visitors engage with the objects and collections presented to them is particularly significant. This thesis has highlighted the social and cultural power museum objects hold, enabling them to become markers of cultural or social identity. The objects explored in this thesis embodied the social and cultural identities of their past, developing multiple layers of meaning and significance throughout their long histories. In Western society, the past appears to be central in the construction of contemporary cultural identity. Consequently, cultural identity requires that 'we try to hold on to what is important from the past and adopt the best features of the now' (Watson 2007: 71). Items of material culture from past civilisations thus become primary sites for the reinstatement of identity in the now. However, ascribing cultural identity to a museum object is in many ways problematic. Similar to the evolving meanings and values which are ascribed to objects in the museum context, 'identity is not fixed but changes with time and circumstance' (Watson 2007: 55). Regardless,

museum displays represent identity, either directly through assertion or indirectly by implication (Karp 1991: 15). So, although some may argue that museum displays are neutral in principle, in practice they always make moral statements (Karp 1991: 14).

When presenting East Asian collections in a Western museum context, attention needs to be given to the process of identity construction itself. In particular, when displaying an East Asian collection in a Western museum space, measures need to be put in place to ensure that the narratives enforced do not only propagate Western identity through notions of difference. Questions can consequently be raised about the power of representation; why certain interpretations are preferred and enforced by museum professionals (Woodward 1997: 15). The issues museums on the island of Ireland are presented with when displaying East Asian collections are therefore not just 'about displays in glass cases', but rather 'relationships between individuals, between museums and communities, and about peoples of different cultures' (Simpson 2001: 3). Connections and understandings therefore need to be built upon respect, tolerance and 'appreciation of difference and similarity' (Simpson 2001: 3). Moreover, it is important for institutions to be honest and accountable with visitors about their role in interpretation processes. It is therefore imperative that museum visitors perceive that the interpretations presented in displays are not necessarily the only way to approach and understand the objects, and may not even represent the correct way of doing so.

For the Ulster Museum and Hunt Museum displays this could be advanced by adding additional contextual information in displays, not only through the outlet of guided tours and aesthetic connections which visitors may either overlook or choose not to partake in. Although all objects prompt engagement regardless of context, fostering beneficial engagement is greatly aided by the inclusion of contextual information which facilitates the visitor in making connections and generating meaning. If additional context was added to these displays through the inclusion of further text panels, updated labels, booklets or an electronic tablet containing further information, the objects could voice a larger proportion of the histories and identity relations which they embody. Currently the display narratives of these collections predominantly highlight the context of their collectors: John Hunt and Con O'Neill. By adding additional information on the origins of these objects, including their

connections to East Asian culture, it would become apparent to the museum visitor that the context of the collector is not the only way in which the collection can be perceived and understood.

The interpretative approach implemented by the Chester Beatty Library instead focusses on the cultural context of the objects, with their collector Chester Beatty playing a secondary role in the museum's master narrative. Through the interviews I conducted with museum visitors at the CBL it became apparent that visitors could perceive both the context of the collector and the cultural origins of the objects in this display. The understanding grasped was largely self-formulated. In this case the museum has thus successfully established more than one narrative through which the collection can be perceived. In this sense, the CBL successfully presents to the museum visitor that there is always more than one way to understand an object or a collection. The narration strategy implemented by the Chester Beatty Library therefore enables the museum further accountability towards interpretation, and the selective processes through which this occurs, by being open and honest with visitors about the multiple understandings which museum collections provide, offering a best practice model for narration which other museums in Ireland could follow.

Consequently, it has become evident that the process of perceiving a museum collection, and the decisions made by museum professionals to present such a perception, is not an objective process. Perception is made up of a complex series of questions surrounding how individuals create meaning from visual experience, a process which is socio-culturally and personally motivated. This affects both sides of the coin: the curators who have put in place selective readings of museum objects and museum visitors who then perceive the objects in a particular way. In each case this process is influenced by the personal background, prior knowledge, values, ideas and beliefs of each individual. Equally, in regard to museum professionals, the institution in which they work may also be a producer or stakeholder in the production of meaning. Visual perception remains an inexhaustible and continually revealing subject of inquiry, and while much research exists surrounding the visual perception of art (Berger 1972; Bartley 1980; Fisher 1980; Mitchell 1994) more research is still needed in the area of visual perception and the museum

environment. As a concept perception is rarely discussed in the related museum studies literature. Nevertheless, in regard to this study, an investigation of perception has emphasised the vast multitude of meanings, values and representations which any one museum object or collection can embody. This therefore holds implications for the selection process made consciously or unconsciously when presenting collections to the public.

Display Approaches: Functions, Uses and Challenges surrounding the Collections (Research Objective Two)

Evaluating the display strategies implemented in each of the four case studies was central to this study (see Chapter Three). A primary finding has been the divergent ways in which similar objects are displayed in a museum setting. This study has found that each museum has taken its own unique approach to displaying their East Asian collections. Underpinning each display approach was a consideration for conservation matters (e.g. light), how the space and exhibition cases were used, and design elements, such as colour, format or text.

The most important finding to emerge is the significant difference between those museums that choose to display predominantly to highlight aesthetic qualities and those museums where the historical narratives dominate. Therefore, when exploring the display of East Asian museum collections in Ireland, it became evident that two main interpretation approaches are in operation. In one approach, East Asian objects are presented as cultural artefacts, objects which represent knowledge constructions of cultures and histories (seen in the National Museum of Ireland and Chester Beatty Library displays). A second is when they are regarded as artworks; objects which hold aesthetic appeal (seen in the Ulster Museum and Hunt Museum displays). This distinction holds major implications for how such objects are to be valued and understood. It also presents ethical challenges surrounding the correctness of interpretation strategies. As two divergent approaches are in operation for similar sets of objects, this calls into question who has the power to make such decisions and how they are determined.

The approach taken largely stems from the classification systems, interpretative strategies and display methods utilised by each museum when classifying the objects and presenting them to the public through exhibitions. This is an area which has been insufficiently explored in museum studies and exhibition design literature. Based on my analysis of museums in Ireland, I would argue that this area is extremely important to determining how an object is understood in its museum context and I would recommend further research in this field.

The two categories into East Asian collections in Ireland have been classified (the aesthetic art object or the cultural artefact), reinstate the fact that there is no one correct method of interpreting these collections. However, this finding also highlights the fact that in Ireland, there exist two broad trends in the interpretation and classification of East Asian collections, as all four institutions explored utilised one of two general classification methods. In the future, if the museums which hold East Asian collections in Ireland were to work together, a conversation could be had about the two categories in operation, and further understanding could be advanced towards why these two classifications are so dominant. Collaboration between museums which have taken different approaches to classification and interpretation could also encourage institutions to be open-minded towards interpretation strategies, progressing the knowledge that the display method implemented is in each case not the only way to approach the collection.

Another prominent finding in relation to Research Objective Two was the endurance of traditional museum display methods in each of the case studies, which raises the question of whether this method of display still suits contemporary society or if it resembles the ‘static’ device it once was (Alexander 1996: 215). In each display, the collections have been presented to their audience in glass cases with text (to differing extents). The use of glass cases and labels as methods of presenting collections to the general public is a practice which has its origins in the early cabinets of curiosities, and accordingly is a display method which has been utilised since the conception of the Western public museum space. The fact that such modes of display remain to some extent still a predominant practice, particularly in regard to displaying East Asian collections in Irish institutions, shows the endurance and survival of classical display strategies.

Traditional display methods carry with them the connotations of their nineteenth-century imperialistic pasts; therefore, care must be taken when using them in the present day, particularly in the display of East Asian collections in the West. However, traditional display methods have been tried and tested for centuries and are thus a safe (correlating with conservation demands) method of presenting collections to the museum visitor. Nevertheless, in order to reflect contemporary diverse society in Ireland, they could prove more effective if used in conjunction with modern methods of interpretation and engagement. The National Museum of Ireland uses traditional display methods alongside the use of an electronic tablet and interactive booklets, where further information on objects, the collection and its collector can be found. Additionally, the Chester Beatty Library incorporates traditional display methods alongside an extensive programme of workshops, tours and events. Workshops engage harder to reach groups and allow the objects in the collection to be perceived in new and exciting ways; an example being the museum's anime and manga drawing classes for teens. It is in this synthesis of traditional and contemporary engagement and display methods where I see a potential for growth in museum interpretation strategies to occur. By embracing technology, the museum can use tablets to incorporate the multiple contexts of museum objects without having to overload a museum display space with text. Equally by engaging with communities and groups through workshops that run alongside traditional displays, a platform can be given to foster community relations and cross-cultural understanding through collections.

This study has found that display practices are undergoing a period of reinvention in the museum space, a result of the changing functions of the modern museum. In the examples discussed in this study, the display cases aesthetically mirror those which have been utilised in the museum for centuries, their uses and functions have altered significantly. I found evidence that, even with established display methods, museums harnessed the potential to promote cross-cultural understanding and acceptance; arguably, a modern-day obligation of the East Asian museum collection in the West. Programmes and initiatives surrounding museum collections are becoming a common occurrence in Ireland. It is through the functions of museum collections that their importance and significance is reinstated. Equally it is through the functions of

collections that their greatest benefits to the museum visitor become apparent. When museum professionals develop educational programmes, workshops, tours or events around a collection, they construct and direct the manner in which these collections will be understood by the museum audience. Chapter Six found that while the Chester Beatty Library is undeniably the frontrunner in this area through the wide diversity of community engagement programmes and initiatives held by this museum, the other institutions explored in this thesis are also making some efforts in this area. Notably the National Museum of Ireland has begun to make progress through a collaboration with Dublin City Council's 2018 initiative *Culture Company* (Dublin's Culture Connects 2018).

Nevertheless, there is still much work which could be accomplished by further engaging with and representing communities through collections. It is therefore imperative for the institutions explored in this thesis to consider how the collections are being used supplementary to their initial display. I argue that it is no longer enough for museums in Ireland to place East Asian collections on display and then move on. Rather if the collections are to be used effectively for cross-cultural understanding and engagement then the programmes and initiatives which run parallel to the displays are as vital as the display itself. Each of the four institutions explored could make greater efforts to engage with harder to reach communities, and particularly with East Asian communities living in or visiting Ireland, as this area of engagement was inadequate in each institution. One method in which museums could achieve this is by taking encouragement from the model of best practice exemplified by the Museum of East Asian Art (MEAA), through the museum's notable project *Eastern Voices in the West* (The Museum of East Asian Art 2014), as will later be explored in the final section of this chapter (see Understanding Display).

This study has also found that it is common in museum practice to utilise a collection for educational goals, therefore binding the display of the collection to its educational benefits. In particular, the Chester Beatty Library collection is at the centre of a range of educational initiatives and community programmes hosted by the museum. The Hunt Museum collection has allowed a series of guided tours, primarily aimed at tourists, to be a core museum function. Through the Bender collection the National Museum of Ireland has been able to take part in guided tours and community

programmes. However, one of the four case studies which stands out in this area is the Ulster Museum's O'Neill collection. This collection has become an educational resource for A-Level (Art and History of Art) and third level students.

The O'Neill collection is an important educational resource in the Ulster Museum. In regard to perception it is therefore hoped by museum staff that this collection will be perceived primarily as educational. In this case the education of visitors has determined both the primary function of this collection and also the dominant way which it will be regarded by visitors. Through this example it becomes evident that museum exhibitions are the primary vehicle through which individuals learn in museums. A result of the educational benefits of this particular museum display is that the Ulster Museum has the opportunity to become central in school and university programmes, since it can offer interaction with objects which the written word cannot. Nevertheless, the educational capacity of museums, and especially of museum-school services has been controversial, both welcomed and resisted (Hooper-Greenhill 2007: 367).

Challenges arise in presenting a museum display as predominantly educational, as this brings into question the idea of universal knowledge. Currently the idea of a universal knowledge system which is true, verifiable and objective is no longer reasonable. In this case the educational strategies put in place have been left open, with minimal amounts of text incorporated in the O'Neill display. Visitors are therefore free to make their own connections, and to draw on the aesthetic similarities of the objects displayed in order to make connections and draw informed conclusions. This is of course achieved by the positioning of the display case, as the placement of this collection is strategic. The early Chinese ceramic wares in the O'Neill collection are positioned directly opposite a display case of studio pottery by Bernard Leach and others. As a consequence, this signifies the connections and influences that can be found between studio pottery, Bernard Leach and early Chinese ceramics. The connections rendered not only in theory present the intermingled relationship between Chinese ceramics and British ceramics, but also the complex relations between East Asia and the West during this time. The educational approach implemented is therefore quite unconventional, in that it fosters interpretative learning through the act of making connections. in this example,

the educational role of the display is intrinsic to its purpose and place in its museum setting. Conversely, in order for this collection to function as an educational device, other museum functions such as communication (display) and conservation must work in agreement alongside educational functions.

I argue that it is the amalgamation of multiple museum functions which enables a museum display to operate effectively as an educational device. Also, it is through the use of collections as educational devices that relations between East Asia and the West can be fostered in the present day, by appropriately educating visitors on the incorporation, appropriation and use of such collections in the West. Each of the displays explored have their own merits, the Hunt Museum and Ulster Museum displays encourage the museum visitor to make their own interpretations of objects on display and in doing so advance self-motivated learning. The National Museum of Ireland has incorporated the master narrative of the collector Albert Bender alongside a number of smaller narratives surrounding the context of the objects on display, enabling visitors to perceive the collection through the lens of their own interests. The approach taken by the Chester Beatty Library has incorporated a number of workshops, tours and events alongside the display, these suit a wide range of interest levels and age groups.

However, moving forward I argue that it is through the culmination of multiple engagement methods that these collections can be used more effectively. Each institution currently places emphasis on a particular area, whether this is the display itself or the programmes which run alongside it. By distributing emphasis in order to incorporate a range of methods through which the collections can be experienced by the museum visitor, the multiple stories, voices and identities surrounding the collections could be further advanced. For example, the Ulster Museum's current focus on self-motivated or visual learning through the display could be advanced by incorporating a lecture series focussing on the histories embodied in individual objects appealing more to verbal learners (a topic explored could be the multiple values of the pilgrim flask discussed in Chapter Seven). Again, it could change the audience which it appeals to by running a series of art workshops that use the collection as inspiration or a starting point, this could appeal to kinaesthetic learners and a variety of ages (children, teens, students or adults) depending on its subject

matter. In doing so attention could be given to additional narratives, understandings and representations presently overlooked by the Ulster Museum's current display strategy.

Interpretative Approaches: Understanding Museum Narrative (Research Objective Three)

This thesis has advanced a better understanding of the narratives constructed by each of the museum displays explored. In each case narratives were supported by labels, text panels, tours (self-guided or demonstrator led) and in the case of the National Museum of Ireland the addition of interactive elements. Accordingly, as previously mentioned, the methods used to present narratives in many ways resemble practices which have not changed for centuries. The evolving factor in contemporary museum practice is therefore narrative itself, as the storylines and contexts presented through museum displays now have an added pressure to reflect the multidimensional societies in which they are situated.

Today's museum visitors expect much more knowledge to be imparted through the function of the museum exhibition as an educational device. The current community focus of many museums also necessitates that exhibition designers pay much closer attention to the representations and messages constructed through displays. Accordingly, the museum space has evolved into a cultural centre and a social instrument in recent years (Alexander 1996: 21). Social and cultural advancements in the museum environment ensure that it remains constantly in flux, meaning that displays and programmes/initiatives surrounding them are also much more likely to evolve frequently. The Ulster Museum, National Museum of Ireland, Hunt Museum and Chester Beatty Library East Asian displays are currently permanent fixtures, however the interviews held with museum curators illustrated that in each case the museums expressed a desire to alter them in some way in the near future. This reflects the mutability of contemporary display environments and presents many advantages, particularly if these institutions were to work collaboratively.

By loaning objects between the four institutions holding East Asian collections in Ireland each museum could better represent contexts currently overlooked in

displays, by temporarily altering interpretative strategies through the addition of new objects. Of course, this also presents challenges surrounding the movement of objects, the cost of doing so and the provision of an appropriate display environment once the objects have reached their destination. However, as revealed in Chapter Four, two of the museums discussed in this thesis, the Chester Beatty Library and the National Museum of Ireland, alternate displayed objects for other items in the same collection (held in each museum's storage facilities), so already complete the process of altering displays regularly. Also, all four collections discussed in this thesis are in many ways comparable in size and in the categories of objects presented, thus similar display environments have been used in each case, including low lighting techniques, glass display cases and plinths. Many of the objects in the East Asian collections in Ireland are durable and small in size making them easy to move, transport and redisplay in existing cases; particularly the ceramic wares or some of the smaller items such as snuff bottles and netsuke. Changing out the objects on display by borrowing from other institutions could allow new narratives and representations embodied by the collections but previously overlooked to be brought to the fore. Equally, it would be one method of meeting the expectations of today's museum visitors who expect more knowledge to be imparted through the function of the museum exhibition as previously discussed.

For example, if the Hunt Museum were to borrow a selection of snuff bottles from the Chester Beatty Library collection, presenting these items alongside the museum's existing East Asian ceramic collection would allow these objects to be interpreted in a new way. Together these two types of object could tell the narrative of imperialism between East Asia and the West during the nineteenth century, the context of pottery manufacture, jade carving and decorative painting traditions in China, or the context of Chinese maritime trade with the West. Additionally, both of these categories of objects were commonly collected during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see Chapter Seven). Therefore, the narrative of John Hunt, who can be surmised as displaying traits of both an inquisitive and a hobbyist collector, could be further unfolded to a greater and more revealing extent than the biographical information currently presented by the Hunt Museum.

The interviews I conducted with museum visitors revealed another aspect of narrative which needs to be taken into account. Interestingly, the interpretative strategies put in place by museum curators (intended messages), were at times not the narratives and storylines perceived by the museum visitor. For example, regardless of the Chester Beatty Library's object centred approach to display, Beatty did still emerge in the responses given to me by visitors when they were asked about the overall storyline of the display and who they felt was represented by the display. However, in this case, the exhibition narratives which visitors observed varied vastly and ranged from East Asia, different countries, Chester Beatty to one visitor who stated that they picked up on the small narratives told about each object. When these results are compared to the National Museum of Ireland, an institution which has chosen to focus primarily on the collector (Albert Bender), it becomes apparent that the results are similar despite a different display strategy imposed. For the NMI, the majority of responses (to the questions: what story do you feel that this exhibit is telling and who do you feel is represented) were either Bender, Japan or China, with an even split between these three responses. The collector is therefore ingrained in a narrative of each of the four East Asian collections in Ireland as a result of their collected backgrounds. This narrative is difficult to move away from despite the Chester Beatty Library's best efforts.

In each case, irrespective of the divergent approaches taken in regard to interpretation, the collectors (Hunt, Bender, Beatty and O'Neill) play a significant role. Retaining a strong connection between the four East Asian collections and the white, male, Western collectors who acquired these objects is something which should be approached with additional care, as overall the histories and backgrounds of the collectors represent a fleeting and one-sided understanding of the object's overall histories. Unfortunately, however, it is hard for the museum to move past this context. As noted in the Ulster Museum visitor interviews I conducted, the vast majority of visitor responses (over half) mentioned O'Neill when asked who/what they felt was represented by the display, despite the museum's best efforts for this not to occur. The interpretation strategies put in place by the Ulster Museum did not intend for Sir Con O'Neill to be the master narrative grasped, yet the collector of these objects still featured heavily in responses. This is perhaps because of the unmistakable connection to O'Neill made in the title of the display: the *O'Neill*

Collection of Chinese Ceramics. This is testament to the difficulty museums face in separating the collection from its collector, especially if the collector is named in the title of the exhibition or museum. Regardless, all of the institutions explored in this thesis have decided to keep the link between the collection and its collector through the display's title, if not also through the name of the museum itself and the master narrative of the display. This is undoubtedly a strategic decision by each institution, enabling visitors native to Ireland to find a shared commonality with the objects displayed, also allowing visitors to the island of Ireland to get a taste of Irish history through the display of these collections. Rather than removing the context of the collector, an extremely difficult if not entirely impossible task, I instead argue that moving forward the four institutions in Ireland need to be more accountable to the fact that there always exist a multitude of ways to perceive and understand collections. Museums are therefore always selective in the narratives, interpretations and representations which they choose to present. Methods of moving past this include those previously mentioned: temporarily changing the displays and display narratives through the loan of new objects, and the presentation of multiple narratives in the one exhibition space.

It is important however to emphasise that choices are always made, even if tacitly, regarding what, how and in whose interests' knowledge will be produced and disseminated (Lindauer 2007: 306). The true challenge therefore is finding the balance between appropriately representing a variety of narratives (viewpoints), while also making the display coherent and enjoyable to view. A reality affecting such decisions is that in many cases the individual narratives of each of the objects held in a museum collection are not known. An example being the Hunt Museum and Ulster Museum displays, as prior to this thesis the objects in these collections remained unresearched. Many museums do not hold the capacity to conduct detailed research projects surrounding the objects they retain. This is due to many factors including lost object records, minimal funding streams for such outlets or time restraints on staff. This vital research could be conducted through museum collaborations with universities and academic researchers, or additionally thorough the involvement of volunteers. A way around this could also be the use of collections in creative ways that allow visitors to be open minded, but that are not necessarily reliant on historical information, such as creative drawing or craft workshops.

Visitors also typically comprehend museum narratives through the lens of their own experiences. Attention consequently needs to be given to each of the potential understandings and contexts which may be perceived through a display, assessing not only the exhibition narratives and interpretations put in place by museum curators, but also the variety of ways which these may be perceived and understood by the visitor. This could be achieved by further assessing the demographic of visitors to the collections, taking into account lifestyles and thus the interests and prior knowledge which visitors may hold, and applying this assessment to the collections' functioning and display.

Within the institutions explored in this thesis there are examples of good practice in this area. The workshops held by the Chester Beatty Library are each catered to select age brackets, therefore they provide examples of best practice in targeting certain groups. For example, the children's workshops which draw from the collection through a variety of storytelling, art or craft activities use the museum's East Asian collection to specifically engage with younger audiences. Rather than assuming all ages will be interested in such events the museum then caters different events and workshops to teens and adults. An example of a teen workshop running currently (July 2020), is an online fan-making workshop which is inspired by the Chester Beatty Library's East Asian collection for ages twelve plus (The Chester Beatty Library 2020). In doing so the CBL has been progressive in its thinking, putting into practice the knowledge that different ages will experience the collection differently. The Hunt Museum's approach to guided tours also takes into account the demographic of its visitors, as each tour is catered specifically to the group, and will change according to the ages of visitors and their interests. The Ulster Museum and National Museum of Ireland East Asian displays could equally benefit if similar resources were given to targeting the needs of their audience, through specifically targeted tours, programmes and events.

The interpretative strategy taken by the Chester Beatty Library is progressive in many ways. By focussing on the narratives of the objects, it enables the museum visitor to perceive the contexts of the objects within the collection if they choose to take the time to explore this information, and move past the name of this institution

(which blatantly signifies collector Chester Beatty). I argue that it is by implementing such a strategy that museums can work towards presenting accountable and open interpretations of collections. By presenting a diversity of narratives surrounding the objects, the museum begins to move away from the context of the collector. In doing so the CBL presents multiple ways in which the collection can understood, advancing the knowledge that there is no one correct way to read and perceive the objects presented within a museum display. The interpretation strategy implemented by the CBL could therefore benefit each of the collections explored within this thesis, if it became a method of practice used more widely.

The Hunt Museum case study presents a further method which could be implemented by all four institutions in order to allow further contexts and histories a voice. The visitor interview sessions conducted at the Hunt Museum recorded awareness of a diversity of narratives and objects which captured the attention of the museum audience. It appears that the individually tailored guided tours and the minimal interpretative elements within this display, successfully allows visitors to consider objects and information catered to their own personal tastes and preferences. The narratives captured by individuals therefore differ in each case, making the overall visitor experience of the museum entirely personal. Interpreting collections through individually tailored guided tours is thus a method which could be implemented by all of the institutions explored, in order to be more open and honest with visitors regarding the selection processes within interpretation and narration strategies. By interpreting the collection through tours (which are never the same twice), rather than predominantly through text within the exhibit. This encourages visitors to make their own understandings of the objects on display, meaning that there are innumerable representations and contexts which could be applied depending on the knowledge and interests of each tour group. In doing so the Hunt Museum presents more than one way of understanding the collection, moving away from the expert knowledge of the institution as the predominant method of meaning-making through the collection displayed.

On the other hand, within museum displays the representation of every possible narrative would not only be unobtainable, but it would make displays confusing for visitors. Nevertheless, as this study has argued, in many cases selective narration

can unintentionally overlook vital information surrounding the objects within collections and the identities which they embody. Moving forward, approaching narration as a multi-layered construction would therefore seem most fitting. Where possible, a further understanding of the lives or histories of individual objects can advance the curator's awareness of the construction and oversight of narratives during the interpretation process. Allowing a deeper understanding of which narratives are being overlooked within a display and which are being represented and understood.

Section Two of this thesis explored a selection of objects from each of the collections: snuff bottles and netsuke, a pilgrim flask and Chinoiserie. Within these three object case studies a multitude of additional narratives not currently expressed by displays came to the fore, including (but not limited to): what it means for objects to belong to a personal collection; the social, cultural, community and symbolic value of objects; the context of the China Trade; cross-cultural encounter; Western imperialism in East Asia; and, the appropriation of East Asian objects in the West. The vast array of potential narratives embodied by the four collections therefore becomes evident. In overlooking many of these, the museums have disregarded important aspects of the identity relations and representations which the objects signify. Correspondingly, a primary finding of this investigation, is that the biographical/life history mode of study is an important method of understanding the histories and contexts of museum objects, and therefore is an important factor in informing display narratives. This study therefore recommends that biographical object study should be a significant aspect of museum narration processes, even though these two areas of practice are not often interrelated.

Museum narration processes are therefore much more significant than they first appear. Through the development of selective display narratives, each of the collections explored within this study plays an important role in presenting an image or impression of East Asian history and culture. Narrative is therefore more than a process of forming meanings and understandings of collections. Instead, it is a social process which, 'brings knowledge into a common signifying space in which meanings are negotiated and articulated' (Silverman 2015: 4). Museum narratives are thus never neutral, as they are the instrument through which object meanings

are defined, redefined and bestowed with new values. There always exists multiple epistemologies, and multiple ways of knowing and understanding material culture. For every object displayed in a museum, multiple meanings have always been inscribed, consequently presenting infinite variations of narratives and storylines which could be represented.

Understanding Display: Advancing the Inclusion of Multiple Stories (Research Objective Four)

This thesis provided an assessment of the social, cultural and political ideologies underpinning the interpretation, narration and display of East Asian collections in Ireland. In outlining the changing implications of (and approaches to) East Asian collections within Irish museum spaces, I have through this thesis, provided a platform for deeper discussions around museum interpretation and display and for a further understanding of the narration of East Asian collections in Irish institutions. The thesis has underlined a number of significant challenges which Western museums are faced with when presenting their East Asian collections to the public. These challenges are imperative to contemporary museum practice, equally affecting museums outside of Ireland in their pursuits to interpret a vast diversity of cultural collections.

The most prominent challenge highlighted through the research undertaken is that of representation and inclusion. This is a concern which is of increasing importance, with intolerance ‘on the rise’ worldwide (Mclean 2018: 121). The formation of museum spaces which facilitate conversations, dialogue and widespread understanding of cultural traditions, values and beliefs which are divergent from the visitors’ own, is thus an ‘urgent matter’ (Mclean 2018: 121). As a general rule, in order to foster relations between cultural groups museums must allocate a certain amount of power, authority and ownership over collections to the groups who feel they hold a right of possession over them (Morgan 2018: 221). Equally, the museum should be open to a range of diverse voices, ‘in order to avoid endlessly reproducing and representing its own belief system’ (Morgan 2018: 221. Steps in the direction of power sharing (between the institution and the visitor), have been advanced by the guided tours in the Hunt Museum, which as previously discussed are largely open to

the interpretations and opinions of individuals. The workshops, programmes and events currently held by the Chester Beatty Library also are a step in the direction of power sharing, as they encourage engagement with the collection on a deeper level. These two examples are methods which each of the institutions explored within this thesis could employ in order to make the first steps toward power sharing through their East Asian collections. They are successful as practices which involve the visitor in processes of meaning-making, and thus could be used more widely. By further collaborating with individuals and communities in interpreting collections, the museums explored would no longer 'be able to decide unilaterally what is good or bad for the public' instead becoming 'true partners with the public' (Falk and Sheppard 2006: 228).

However, as previously mentioned, aside from the Chester Beatty Library's guided tours in Mandarin and Japanese languages (see Chapter Six), little to no effort has been made to engage with East Asian communities specifically, through the four collections explored in this study. Engagement with the East Asian communities living in or visiting Ireland is no easy pursuit. As previously mentioned in Chapter Five, for the Ulster Museum past efforts have not been well received, with a lack of interest from the Chinese community groups in Northern Ireland. However just because it is difficult or, like the Ulster Museum's experience, past engagement attempts have not been successful, this does not mean that the museum should give up. The four East Asian collections in Ireland hold potential for future cross-cultural engagement and for new relationships between museums and communities to be fostered. Successful attempts, most notably the *Eastern Voices in the West* project initiated by the Museum of East Asian Art (Bath) in 2011, mean that this can be achieved in the future if the correct approach is taken.

I argue that the MEAA oral history project is a model which could be used by each of the four museums explored within this study. This project ran from 2011-2014 'its aim was to promote cultural understanding amongst local communities and unveil the previously unexplored history of Chinese immigrants to Bath' (The Museum of East Asian Art 2014). The project was instigated in order to give a voice to Chinese residents living in Bath and North-East Somerset (being the largest minority group in this area) through the museum's collections, something which the collections in

Ireland could equally benefit from. Especially since the Chinese community in Northern Ireland is the province's largest minority ethnic group (Culture Northern Ireland 2020), and also potentially the largest (if not the second largest to Polish nationals) minority ethnic community in the Irish State (Health and Safety Executive 2020). The MEAA project was successful, finding that the individuals who took part shared their 'emotional journeys from being strangers to becoming members of the community' (The Museum of East Asian Art 2014); culminating with a 2014 exhibition. This demonstrates the power that museums hold in providing a space where such relationship building can be fostered, therefore the power and influence of the museum in engaging communities and encouraging cross-cultural understanding cannot be ignored moving forward.

The educational value of East Asian collections in Ireland also is an important attribute of their existence, as they each hold diverse and multi-vocal histories which can engage the museum visitor. Therefore, using these collections as devices for learning within the museum space can be extremely positive. Challenges do however occur through the selection process made in determining which histories or voices the collections will embody through processes of interpretation. Museum education strategies often use collections in institutional aims and objectives, which undoubtedly influence knowledge constructions. An example of this is the use of the Bodhisattva from the *Albert Bender Collection of Asian Art* within the National Museum of Ireland's *Rainbow Trail* (see Chapter Four). In this case the Bodhisattva has been used to fabricate an interpretation associated with LGBTI+ representation, coinciding with the museum's role in 2019 *Dublin Pride* (National Museum of Ireland 2019). I instead argue that these collections could be used more effectively in educating visitors on the themes of cultural inclusion and cultural representation through the East Asian origins of the objects. Undoubtedly museums will use collections in institutional aims and objectives, and to a certain extent this allows collections to become mutable in the representation of prominent topics and debates within contemporary society, reinventing collections and reinstating their significance by using them to support prominent contemporary aims. However, in doing so the topical discussion points which have been a part of these objects' histories for centuries remain unaddressed, primarily: the power imbalance of their manufacture and collection, their symbolism of Western imperialism in East Asia and the use of

East Asian religious objects within Western secular public spaces. Until these issues have been addressed within the museum spaces holding East Asian collections in Ireland, the use of these collections in the depiction of other topical debates is perhaps premature, and overlooks the obvious discussions which the objects signify but which are not being articulated.

As the museum space continues to evolve knowledge should be presented as the multidimensional construction that it is, as it relates to multiple voices and a diversity of perspectives. A method of incorporating diverse narratives would be to give the visitor more authority, as each visitor too possesses knowledge and opinions. The downfall of this strategy is of course the dissemination of false or misleading information, thus visitor authority as a solution is in no way unproblematic. Nevertheless, asking visitors more questions, and allowing them to become part of the interpretation process, is a practice which each of the four collections explored within this thesis could benefit from. This could be achieved through guided tours which ask the visitor to share their thoughts and opinions as implemented by the Hunt Museum, or through workshops which encourage a greater level of engagement as implemented by the Chester Beatty Library. Additionally, the museums could ask the visitor questions, encouraging their input in processes of meaning-making, through leaflets available beside displays or within the displays themselves in the format of additional labels. The Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History (California) has established many participatory approaches to exhibition design through museum Director Nina Simon (author of *The Participatory Museum* 2010). Throughout the museum, visitors are asked for their input, with questions placed on walls and within labels throughout exhibitions. Also engaging visitors with participatory exhibits, an example being the 2012 *Memory Jars* instillation, which invited visitors to write down their own memories and display them (The Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History 2020). Approaching display and interpretation through the lens of participation could greatly impact the East Asian collections in Ireland, inspiring conversation and the representation of multiple voices through participatory exhibition strategies.

Moreover, with the advancement of smartphones and readily available internet access within most public spaces (including the museum), knowledge can no longer

be maintained. The use of technology such as tablets within displays that contain further information about objects or smartphone technology that could enable visitors to download additional information about the objects displayed would be another method of presenting multiple narratives, e.g. QR codes. This method has the advantages of not overcrowding an exhibition space with text, and also providing a solution which coincides with today's fast paced and technologically driven society in the West. Today knowledge cannot be 'managed or controlled' and is a 'fluid, changing and unstable' phenomenon (Hooper-Greenhill 2007: 371). The museum should be a reflection of this, rather than a space which impedes this growth. Additionally, by incorporating a method of accessing multiple narratives or voices within displays this accepts multiple ways of knowing, thus cultural and social difference are also more readily accepted (Hooper-Greenhill 2007: 374). Incorporating this method would also advance learning opportunities for a broader range of people.

The most significant finding to emerge from this study is the advantage of utilising an interdisciplinary approach within the evolving Western museum space. Museums are by their very nature organisations designed to 'interrogate the human spirit' (Mclean 2018: 121), therefore they are uniquely placed to support multidisciplinary experiments. Currently the museum space has been at the core of much debate within a variety of disciplines including (but not limited to): museum studies, graphic design, theatre, animation, film, sociology, architecture, design theory and art history. Research in this area encourages links between disciplines and a 'deep desire to join forces to create new ways of working, new knowledge and importantly contributions to real and positive change' (Piehl and Francis 2018: 225). This is a direct result of the new roles and responsibilities of Western museum spaces within contemporary society, as the museum space has gained new functions as a mediator of cultural understanding, promoter of community development and a provider of educational experiences, alongside obligations concerning collections care and communication. This diversity of museum functions is of interest to a variety of disciplines. Although multiple disciplines have been involved in the discussion of the museum space, only a small percentage of recent research has utilised a cross-disciplinary approach as an answer to the development of new museum practices (Piehl and Francis 2018, Mclean 2018). I argue that a primary

method of resolving the challenges and difficulties currently faced within the museum sector stem from exploring new multidisciplinary approaches to working, as today's diversified society requires us to 'create mash-ups and emphasise connections' (Mclean 2018: 130). Museum practice could equally benefit from being more open to collaborations with, and using new models acquired from, the entertainment industry, libraries, health care facilities and a wide variety of other sectors, alongside being more open to partnerships and collaborations with other museums. This would facilitate a wide range of new possibilities for the advancement of pre-existing ideas.

This thesis has discovered many advantages to utilising a multidisciplinary approach when examining both museum practices and museum collections. Likewise, it has emphasised the benefits of exploring both the museum displays alongside individual objects within them. The most prominent being a greater awareness of the multitude of narratives surrounding any one museum collection, and therefore the ability to more inclusively represent the objects in displays. East Asian collections within Western museum spaces, by their very nature as collections which have travelled from manufacture and initial use in one culture, through trade relations and cultural appropriation to another, are an embodiment of cross-cultural and multidimensional connections and thus are suited to multidisciplinary experiments.

In particular, this study has underlined the benefits of approaching East Asian collections in Ireland through the lens of three disciplines: museum studies, art history and cultural sociology. By doing so the practice of displaying objects, their visual form and biographical context alongside an understanding of how visitors interact with them is further advanced. At a scholarly level, I argue that it is therefore appropriate to employ the multidisciplinary approach which this research has advanced in museum practice more broadly, especially when working with East Asian collections in the West. This would involve three steps: (1) a consideration of what interpretations and narratives current displays are portraying (museum studies approach); (2) a review of how museum visitors respond to current narratives in regard to perception, understanding and cultural representation (cultural sociology approach); (3) a further consideration of the objects within displays, undertaking visual analysis and historical/biographical research to determine the representations and narratives currently overlooked by displays (art history approach). This research

has completed each of these steps in regard to the four East Asian collections in Ireland, however, other museum collections locally, nationally and internationally could equally benefit from this model. The next step for the case studies explored within this thesis would be to implement the theoretical findings of this research in applied museum practice.

Final Points

The Western museum cannot easily solve the host of dilemmas and challenges which it currently faces, and this thesis has primarily only highlighted the multitude of challenges and questions which it confronts. However, it can be a space within which such questions are asked (Conn 2010: 20). The museum has the capacity to tell stories and represent histories, therefore through its practices it also has the ability to foster new realities, connections and understandings by responsibly confronting the narratives it tells.

Exhibitions and displays are the most prominent and distinctive of a museum's public offerings, and thus are usually the major focus of such transformative efforts and initiatives (Mclean 2018: 127). Displays are not static products, they more often than not define the cultures and identities represented and are crucial factors in the promotion of enlightened visitor perceptions. The implementation of a multidisciplinary approach to working would thus be best suited to provide new compelling display methods. The museum can only facilitate valuable engagement with East Asian objects in the West, if the embodied identities are not lost or overlooked. As the museum continues in its endeavours to narrate society, it is thus imperative that the storylines presented encourage progressive curiosity whilst sustaining attitudes of acceptance.

The narrative and visitor experience focussed relationship between objects and museums today places additional pressure on the interpretations expressed through collections. This generates dispute surrounding the narratives and objects overlooked within current displays, by the museum professionals and academics who currently dominate such decisions. Equally questioning if the community groups, who in the cases explored within this study have been left out of museum

interpretation practices, would make these decisions differently. Accordingly, only by fully comprehending the vast multidimensional histories of museum collections, exploring both their individual histories and their place within a museum display, can we understand how they will conform to and be used by contemporary society.

The four institutions explored in this thesis have the opportunity to use their East Asian collections to tell currently untold stories. Each of the collections explored embodies a vast array of social, cultural and political ideologies which go much further than the biography of their collectors. The collections each have much more to offer; by working with these collections through community collaborations, multidisciplinary approaches, new interpretations of displays, temporary exhibitions and by engaging visitors through additional workshops, tours and events, previously overlooked contexts could be voiced. If given the opportunity to further project the multiplicity of stories which they embody, the collections could become devices for further engaging with East Asian communities in Ireland, and for the future promotion of cross-cultural relations and understanding. If approached as multidimensional embodiments of society and history, the East Asian collections explored within this thesis present opportunities for the advancement of community relations, cultural value and identity representation within the museum space in Ireland and beyond.

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Appendix A: Transcriptions of the Interviews Conducted with Museum Curators and Professionals

Curator/Museum Professional Interview Questions

Note: Although the interview questions for museum curators and professionals remained the same in each case, the wording was tailored for each collection; e.g. the name of each collection/collector was switched corresponding to the museum under investigation.

1. Can you tell me about your role in the museum and how you became associated with the collection?

2. What are the intendant messages/narratives told through this exhibition?
    a. Talk me through the interpretation and display of the **[insert collection name]**.
    b. How significant is the story of **[insert collector's name]** life to the collections overall narrative/ interpretation?
    c. What role do the individual meanings/uses/histories of the objects have within the narrative of this exhibition?
    d. What is the primary storyline/message which this exhibition aims to portray?
    e. What is the reasoning for choosing/implementing these interpretations?
    f. Who developed the interpretation strategy/interpretative implements/text panels for this exhibition?

3. Is the placement of the objects significant?
    a. What consideration has been given to the objects spatial relations to each other?

4. What thought/consideration was given to the colour choices used within the exhibition?
    a. Why/ how were the colours for this display chosen?
    b. **(additional question for the Chester Beatty Library only)** Do colour changes play a role in dividing sections and categories within this exhibit? Is it expected that objects displayed in separately coloured rooms will be seen as separate?

5. What consideration has been given to lighting within this exhibition?
    a. Alongside the preservation of objects were any emotive factors considered when implementing dim lighting techniques?

6. Was the exhibition inspired by other/best practice displays of Asian art within national institutions/other museums?
    a. Which individuals or institutions were consulted when planning the display of this collection?

7. What is expected that visitors will observe during/ take home after their visit to this exhibition?

   a. What interpretations/storylines is it expected that museum visitors will pick up on?
   b. What is the general consensus of visitor feedback for this exhibition? How do museum visitors generally react to this exhibit?

8. Were community groups involved in the formation of the current exhibitions?
   a. Do community initiatives currently play a role in this collections function?
   b. Who did play a role in the formation of this exhibition?

9. What is the primary audience of this collection?
   a. What audience is this exhibition primarily catered towards?

Interview with Audrey Whitty, Keeper of the Art and Industrial Division (Decorative Arts and History)
National Museum of Ireland (Collins Barracks)
Dublin
Monday 3rd December 2018, 11.30 am

Note: The interviewee (Audrey Whitty) had a printed version of the interview questions in front of her during the interview, in asking interview questions in many cases I was only prompting discussion surrounding the next question on the list.

So first I wanted to ask about your role in the museum, and how you first came across the Bender collection.

I've worked here (apart from a career break of two years spent in the United States) since June of 1998 and I worked in Kildare Street in our museum of archaeology initially as an education assistant for fifteen months. Then I left and did some archaeology in 1999 and then came back in October 1999 to documentation, and then got promoted to curator in June 2001, and part of the remit of my curatorship which went on for thirteen years was ceramics, glass and Asian collections; so that's how I came across the Albert Bender collection, primarily was really from 2001 onwards, I would have been responsible for it. Then I took the two years out to become curator of European and Asian glass at the Corning Museum of Glass in New York, and I would have stayed only that I got offered the keepership of the site here, which involves running all collections and all exhibitions and leading the curatorial team. So, I came home January 2015. So, I still have to curate those three areas in addition to being keeper, as since the recession we still aren't up to the numbers that we would have had before the recession. Traditionally anyway the four keepers, ultimately one per each of the public sites of the museum of Ireland, would always maintain a curatorial remit as well; so, it's great value for money let's put it that way. But its lovely, it's great because at least you can still keep your hand in exhibitions, and also in research as well, and certainly acquisition, you're in charge of acquiring everything now, all decorative arts and all history collections. But I came across Albert Bender as a story, probably before I became curator in June 2001, when I was working in documentation and also as a curatorial researcher for the National Museum, particularly for this site here in Collins Barracks and I would have herd the former director Dr Patrick Wallace talking about it. I remember thinking that it was a fascinating story, and that it sounded quite tragic that it hadn't been on display since 1973. So, when I became curator I had East Asia as part of the remit I just felt so incredibly privileged and I just thought something has to be done about this. The more I delved into it the more I realised that I wanted to do my PhD on this, I had been waiting for something that good, I suppose that meaty, to come along. Something that I wouldn't find a chore to write and do in addition to working full time. I just felt like it all aligned at the right time for me, especially when I went to Mills College Oakland and was able to go through all the material there as well as what's here it all came together.

To then focus a bit more on the display of the collection please. The interpretation of the display, and the thoughts behind that. How did your research inform the current display of the collection?

I'll be honest, initially I wanted the entire wing where Irish country furniture is, the three rooms. Due to the recession hitting in 2008 the decision was made, and at the time I wasn't sure what I should do, if I should push it until 2009 to see if that made a difference in getting the full wing or not, but in the end, I think it was looking at the financial climate at the time; I thought no I'll take it now or else it might be delayed for seven or eight years. I was very glad I made that hunch or it may have got worse. Particularly from 2010 onwards they were pretty lean years, up until around 2014 2015 were lean enough. So, we got three quarters of that wing, still a huge amount of space. So, it ended up I was able to display 170 objects out of the 264 that form part of the Albert Bender collection, it's a very good sprinkling, an overview, and I wanted to do it according to the different media; whether it be textiles, metal, ceramics. And also, the wide geographical span of the collection and the time periods. We also sat down with Haley Sharp design who are based in Leicester, they were are exhibition designers that we appointed and the guy who was the exhibition architect Vis (Vyas?) Patel. Vis and I realised that we had to use dormitory style rooms of the military barracks and try and bring some intimacy to it but at the same time have the monumental material in the larger space, but also use the rafters of that space as a semi-temple like effect, so that you have them hanging, and obviously for conservation purposes you have to have them encased and controlled. Thangkas being made of essentially vegetable oil involve major conservation. It's a mixture of textile and paper conservation and we ended up being over a specialist from the UK who had worked for the Victoria and Albert Museum, himself and his wife who was also an expert they were able to look at training up four other textile conservators here in Ireland to look at doing up all of them. We actually ended up preserving all 21 thangkas, even though there is twelve on display. We rotated them once, and we will try to rotate them on a regular basis. The design was very much dictated by the story itself, and having to introduce him as a man and having to introduce collecting preferences. We didn't just introduce Asian art, but also his strong Jewish background in Ireland and obviously his modern art patronage and his book collecting. And to put him in contrast that it wasn't just Asia, he was brilliantly ahead of his time just like his brother Alfred and how he dealt with his chief rabbi period in Cape Town. They could see the humanity of people regardless of your nationality or regardless of the colour of your skin and I think that they were very lateral thinkers about the world and about the whole Bender family must have had that in them or else Albert wouldn't have had the interests that he had, and he was a major feminist as well; very interesting man.

More on the colours and the division/ spatial arrangement of the objects. Is a division intended where the colours are divided?

The blood (red) was chosen because we thought it was more of a reference to China, the graphic design was done in house by Yvonne Docherty, who is a talented graphic artist. She also ended up designing the graphics of the publication as well, so there was a run through the whole way even though that was 2011 by the time it came out and the exhibition opened in November 2008. The cover was designed by John Murry, but the actual graphics (in the book) reference the graphics of the

exhibition and that is all Yvonne Docherty's work, she's just amazing, so the graphics were done entirely by Yvonne. We sat down with Haley Sharp to look at the text, to look at the various different primary/ secondary levels of the text, and how we were going to distract that, a lot of the decisions were made by myself in the end. We had a limited word count obviously per-panel, we didn't wasn't to overpower people with the amount of reading; a book on a wall. But at the same time, you need to have context, and you certainly need to be culturally aware of the thangkas being Tibetan Buddhist but being from Gansu Province which is technically Chinese territory. So, we specifically designed the text and the graphics to read Tibetan Buddhist China, that was very deliberate. In early Christian Ireland, it is a similar situation with insular art between Ireland and Britain because it is all Celtic at that time but you're not sure what part of the Irish sea so you just call it insular art and we figured that this is a similar thing with Tibetan Buddhism because it is definitely culturally speaking Tibetan but it was by all accounts by my research anyway, seeming to have come from Gansu, which is China ultimately. We were trying to make sure that all those bases were ticked. The carpet we decided that we would do carpet tiles, which immerse into each other over time, quite deliberately in the first two rooms around the clock as well, so that it would look like you were going into a space that was joined up in terms of its thinking, but which was very different from the gallery you've just been coming in from which was country furniture. This is much earlier in date, and basically, we had taken the vast majority of this material down and it was moved to the Museum of Country Life in Castlebar. One of the four National Museum sites outside of Dublin, and that is where it has a much better context, because that's the Irish vernacular story whereas decorative arts and history is here, so it is an incongruous situation. A lot of the things about gallery development in National museums are really about an injection of capital for a particular topic or themed exhibition, and you would be given a space and nine times out of ten you are not thinking is it in context with the other galleries upstairs, downstairs, to the left, or to the right. You have to just think of the amount of funding you've got for a particular project. We're going to look at that though in the future in terms of maybe reinterpreting certain parts of this site so that there is more of a flow. But, by its nature it's not an easy site in that regard. Because the four sides of the square, only three really marry up at the moment, because the rest is storage, so until we have the four sides it's going to be a little bit hit and miss, sometimes it's great and sometimes you have to go on a trek to the toilet. But, the design of the colour was chosen very deliberately to reference China in particular, and then there's the show symbol of longevity which was part of the graphic design in terms of the heading. You will see that in all of the ephemera relating to the exhibition, the general flyer and all of that had a particular brand, 'A Dubliners Collection of Asian Art: The Albert Bender Exhibition' all of it had a show symbol of longevity from China. So, there is a very distinctive brand associated with the exhibition and that came from Yvonne Docherty as well, in terms of her interpretation of particularly the photographic images of work. Everything was digitally photographed which was easier said than done, particularly for things like thangkas, having to get them to particular studio equipment, which is mostly based in our Museum of Archaeology on Kildare Street. We've a smaller on-site studio here for photography, so for the larger objects, they had to be transferred out there to be shot correctly, for photography. So, it is very tricky. But, certainly the show symbol (the symbol of longevity) came from the background in one of the thangkas, well actually most of the thangkas had these later nineteenth century Chinese embroidered mounts that they are sitting on, and

obviously the thangka itself is seventeenth century. But the mounts when you look at them closely have the show symbol on that Chinese embroidery, so that's what we used for the graphic headline interpretation basically, and the marketing, so it is part of what you see on the website, it is part of all the ephemera. Part of obviously the heading to the gallery as you walk in over the door, so it was very deliberately chosen. Even the stickers on the floor, these try to lead people up because it is very far from the main reception area. This is what I'm talking about in terms of the flow, the natural flow, is not what you would call ideal. So it was a huge concern for me to try to get people fed up through the building, when they have to go through so many exhibitions, on their way, and to keep it within their minds eye that their ultimate destination is to come up and see the Bender collection. The actual title 'A Dubliners Collection of Asian Art' that was agreed on primarily by the former director Dr Patrick Wallace, we came up with a number of different alternatives and then technically speaking he decided out of curtesy, as head of the institution he would be the main decision maker on that. So, the actual graphic wallpaper was a first for us, and was quite revolutionary even for national museums in Europe at the time. Yvonne Docherty did an incredible job in terms of the graphics, but the actual the company that produced it (since then they have went under so I can't think of the name), but it wasn't what I would call ideal from a practical point of view because bubbles would literally form on the background between that and the wall surface. Ultimately, you are looking at the traditional wallpaper effect of putting the paste of the glue behind it and if it is not evenly applied you will get the bubble effect. So I stripped it down twice before it was correct, I was really particular that I needed no bubbles, and it worked brilliantly in the end and it has been quite long, you know, pretty good wearing ten years later. But, the two first rooms were primarily wallpaper graphic and everything else was your standard MDF graphic exhibition panel. They work really well.

Were any other exhibits were looked at for reference. For example, the colour palette of the British Museum and V&A East Asian collections are similar.

When I was looking at sources I was more drawn to content rather than design. The turquoise green/ blue is used widely as it is usually inspired by celadon glaze, naturally assumed. But it wasn't part of why we chose those colours at all actually, but I was very taken by the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, they have an incredible Asian art collection and I wanted it to be as classical looking as that. Where they have these very tall cases usually for statuary pieces, and it is just stunningly classical, you can't put an actual date on it and I wanted ours to be similar where it wouldn't age. So, the ROM, I definitely thought the Rom's exhibit was beautiful, the galleries are extensive. So, I was looking more towards Canada, and traditionally in Ireland, particularly I suppose in this national museum we do look to Canada. I suppose for a very particular reason, because we are bilingual just like Canada, so when you are looking at how to combine two languages on one panel we have a limited space for text. You have to go towards another model, and a really good one for us has been Canada. In the early stages of this complex (Collins Barracks) which of course was only opened in 1997 as a National Museum we even employed interpretative planners from Canadian companies quite deliberately because of the bilingualism and their ability to combine the two languages, the primacy, and how successfully they had done that. So, it is exactly the same here. The language is a big deal for the curator, because you have a limited amount of text

anyway and then you have to cut it down again because Irish by its definition is a more wordy language so you have to try and make it look like there is an equal distribution in terms of paragraphs on the panel, but sometimes it doesn't end up like that and you don't want to lose the meaning in either language. So, translating is a very crucial, so that translation into Irish would happen in tandem and consistency throughout so that the actual context is not lost in terms of the development of the exhibition and the interpretation of individual objects. So that's the same so let's say in a country like Canada. And then, we also wanted to look at new discoveries for instance the Sung dynasty fernery jars which are extremely tall, beautiful examples, are they conservator of Ceramics was then unsure whether one may have been a later copy and the other was a more original Sung dynasty date, whereas I was convinced that they were original and authentic and that they were probably quite sound in terms of their dating so we sent the lids for Thermal Luminescence Analysis to Oxford. Oxford and ironically San Francisco are the only two cities in the world that offer this TL analysis, so you bore a tiny little whole through the clay and you are able to get a particular date a bit like Radiocarbon Dating, except using ceramic clay and they came back as 900-1000 AD so it's not just Sung its early Sung so very happy with that. So, we incorporated that kind of interpretation into the dating which is on the very first room, and is part of the graphic wallpaper, but you don't see it you just see 900-1000 AD; there wasn't enough space to go into the story being the TL analysis. But that is interpreted in the book. So, it was important for me, because it was still a work in progress, my PhD wasn't submitted until 2009 and my viva was held in December 2009 so I had the exhibition opening a whole year before that. So, for me it was imperative that the moment I got the PhD that the publication would follow almost immediately so that people would have the option to delve deeper into the story than what was just on display.

A bit more about the story, the thought behind the narrative. Why were these aspects of the storyline chosen, was it to try and make the objects more relatable to people?

Definitely, also we didn't want to shy away from the Adolf Mahr story, we deliberately set about telling that story in all of its controversy. Because he was an Austrian Nazi and he had been promoted to the directorship of the National Museum of Ireland, the reason why the Irish state at that time were employing mostly Germans and Austrians instead of British was because it was only the second decade after independence so they didn't want to go to the old enemy (quote on quote) for senior civil servants. There was a deliberate strategy of the Irish Free State of the time to go to Europeans if there was a deficit at home, and they felt obviously that they must have had a deficit at home, they appointed Adolf Mahr. Initially they appointed Adolf Mahr as Keeper of Irish Antiquities in 1927 he was an incredible Celtic archaeologist, archaeology was his forte, he was a genius which is an awful shame because if he stayed away from his political leanings he would have had an intact legacy, it would have been unblemished. But unfortunately, he chose otherwise and Albert Bender was on the receiving end of blatant anti-Semitism in letters in 1933, very deliberately done by Mahr because Hitler becomes chancellor in January of 1933 and I suppose was buoyed up by this and thought nothing of talking to an Irish/ American Jewish benefactor in that way which to me is just horrendous. So, it's all very much told in terms of individual more personal type stories and the interpretation we used were these glass panels so in the first room you have the story of Albert's brother Alfred Bender, the chief rabbi of Cape Town to show that there is this very strong Jewish

link throughout all members of the Bender family from the father obviously being the chief rabbi of Dublin, the Reverend Philip Bender to the eldest son Alfred to the other son Albert, so I wanted to tell that Jewish story very much. Then in the other room we decided that we would have to be honest, with the public about the story surrounding Adolf Mahr and how that showed the humanity of Albert Bender because it was only down to Albert Bender that those donations continued and that he didn't ask for anything to be handed back after the treatment that had been given to him by Mahr in the letters. I think Bender had this incredible sense of longevity, where long after himself and Adolf Mahr were dead and buried that the collection would life on. So we wanted to highlight that, allowing the collection to be displayed around it, ultimately the trump card was with Albert Bender, it was not with Mahr, Mahr did not win. We kept the original plaque that you see in the first room in honour of his mother, and even though the original exhibition opened in Kildare street in June 1934, the year 1933 is on the plaque, so obviously the office of public works who we still work with here in the museum, who do all the carpentry, all of the lighting. They obviously got delayed, but the original intention was that it would actually open to the public in 33. Very interesting I thought. I wanted to reference the older display as well, particularly showing respect to Albert Bender's mother because that's what he wanted.

Thoughts behind lighting.

We brought in a major lighting designer on this one, and it was the first time we have done such a thing her name is Dervla O'Shea from Ireland but based in Edinburgh, she is an incredible lighting designer, she is in great demand throughout all parts of Europe actually, but she had trained initially in stage and set design for the theatre and then she trained later into the logistics of museum lighting in terms of lux levels, UV and all the rest of it and combined the two talents into very dramatic lighting design. We put a lot of money, we invested very strategically and deliberately in the area of lighting for this. Because of the thangkas and ukiyo-e, we wanted to make sure that they could still maintain full display without any decreasing of the condition of these objects. But at the same time, we wanted your eye to adjust, so you know the way you sometimes go into museums and there's a very darkened corner that's displaying paper and they you can't really see because it's gone so dark, so we very deliberately have it on a very low level of lux so your eye doesn't know that and it doesn't need to adjust because it is so thoroughly and evenly distributed. So, it's actually very deliberately done by Dervla O'Shea, so we put a lot of thought into the lighting.

Final point about visitors, and what was the audience which was expected for this collection? General visiting audience? Tourists?

It was, it was for both the international visitors coming into the museum and the home audience. We didn't go down the route of community engagement which is what most museums would do, particularly when it comes to Asian Collections. We would do so now most definitely, but at the time we didn't have the resources available, whereas now it would be seen as a major integral component of what we would do specifically when it comes to non-western collections. But at the same time we were very aware of trying to harness good will particularly of the Chinese community here in Dublin and we also were trying to promote that as much as

possible so we did bring in a journalist from a Chinese news-paper here in Dublin. We brought people in so much so that the thangka, Upasaka Dharmatala, associated with the tiger, it's on the actual thangka itself this beautiful image of a tiger, in 2010 the Chinese New Year of the tiger, the Irish postal service commissioned a stamp of that particular tiger for the Irish stamp for the Chinese New Year and it went all over the world. We do it in those sort of ways as well, that it would be internationally known, that we would have these collections on China and that the Irish hold them on behalf of all people around the world. But, we've also had, recently we have the director of the Beijing Palace Museums over and he's had a great look through the collection. So we ensure, its more from our point of view that, we have the community hopefully thinking that we've done it in a respectful and hopefully a non-controversial manor, particularly concerning Tibet that everyone has been addressed, that all their concerns have been addressed and that its been even handed and not coming down either pro or anti regardless of what side, I think that's very important. I think certainly in terms of the Chinese community were very helpful there, particularly that journalist. During and after in terms of that particular journalist, but with the Palace Museum that was after that would have been 2018 and that's with the view of looking at exchange between the research of our two institutions. He also visited the Chester Beatty. There's been a huge realisation within China only very recently of the incredibly high quality Chinese collections in Ireland. Mindful of 'break ins' particularly since 2013, very aware of that as have other places on these islands, as well as Belgium. Primarily rhinoceros horn though so it tends to be more natural history collections, there are libation cups made out of rhinoceros horn that would have traditionally went into decorative arts collections so we are very mindful of that and we did remove a number of things of display but not from the Bender collection. We very deliberately did that, so that would be something that we do just as a matter of course if there's cause for concern. If we here about certain gangs across Europe looking for certain objects. But the education and outreach department within the National Museum here in Collins Barracks they would have been basically the audience advocate there, so I might want to contact them about what they have done but I don't think they have done anything formal as such in terms of evaluation reports and that sort of thing.

Over ten years we roughly have about three hundred thousand people come into this site every year. Over the three museums it's about 1.3 million ever year, at the minute it's about 1.25 for this year in 2018, in 2016 it was 1.3 million. For instance, I'll just give you 2016 we had four hundred and forty thousand people just coming to this site, who would have seen Albert Bender. Huge mix of people and there's been a lot of Irish research done, particularly on our Irish visitor numbers because you are looking at the tourists coming in but you are also looking at the domestic tourist within the Island of Ireland coming to the National Museums, and also you have through the education and outreach department a huge amount to do with primary and post primary school groups. This tends to be more intermittent (does not involve Bender collection) because of a lack of staff and resources in the education department, but I am hoping that your research will actually force the issue a bit, so your, really this is very helpful in terms of how I am concerned. Extremely helpful, because it is something I would have liked to have seen happen a lot sooner than now. It happens but it happens intermittently, particularly for Chinese New Year. For Albert Bender's birthday 18th June 1866, we should have had something for the centenary of his birth 150 years on in 2016 but with the huge amount going on with

another centenary in that year for both the Easter Rising and also the Battle of the Somme there's only a certain amount of staff to go around to do all of these jobs ultimately. So that was unfortunate really, but it is there in terms of a remit, very much an essential part of the education remit. Very much an essential part of what they will provide, but usually if there is a tour it's me whereas with other galleries here particularly on the history side and with Eileen Ray as well, it is not necessarily, they would have it from a tour guide panel. This year especially I was training the tour guide panel on Albert Bender, this is the first time that there has, been resources there to do that so I hope that in the future there might be some tours. It would be great if you wanted to contact Lorraine Comer head of education. Also, Helen Beaumont who is the education outreach officer for this site.

We did put in an interactive element into the Albert Bender exhibition, however it wasn't very successful it's on Chinese woodblock printing. It's supposed to heat up on the tablet on the right-hand side, it's a hot plate. Unfortunately, it's not working and hasn't been. I wanted to include the extra flip books, I insisted on them, to show that he had great Irish links and that he wasn't in isolation and that he kept in contact and was in contact about the country and its development since he had left. It wasn't just this left to field thing, that he was out in the middle of nowhere that there was a very deliberate strategy in Alberts mind. Also, the computer terminal which shows the entire collection is something that I really thought was important alongside the temple reconstruction of how the thangkas would have been draped so you go into different levels on that. The only issue is that sometimes the woodblock print interactive has been switched off for some reason, unfortunately I am not there in the gallery on the day to day but unfortunately it is frustrating. But thankfully the others are working most of the time, the interactive on the other side, on the computer. That really is just so important in giving a general overview of the other material that I wasn't in a position to display in particular and there's incredible murals from the sixteenth century Ming dynasty, they are all in the book though. But it would be wonderful, there is also another thangka that is very different from the 21 which is an extremely rare one of Allah Kavishwar, the female personification of a Bodhisattva and it is Chinese from the eighteenth century and it is an exceptional thangka, one of the best probably that would be in a European public collection. So, I would love to display that, to have more room to display all of it. That may happen in the future, it may not but I'm glad at least that we've gotten to where we've gotten but it would be ideal to extend it I think. Also, just to have an Asian wing, for instance my own idea for that particular space would be that we take out Irish country furniture and put in a Middle Eastern section so that you're going from Islam to the Far East, so that there is more of a train of thought I that particular case rather than going from Irish country furniture into the Far East. But, that decision ultimately rests higher up, but it is something which I have certainly suggested in the past.

Interview with Naomi O'Nolan (Head of Exhibitions and Collections) Irene Macken and Margaret Walsh (both Museum Docents)
Hunt Museum
Wednesday 20th February 2019
12.30pm

Note: I did not need to verbally ask the interview questions I had set in this case as the interviewees preferred to print and read over them prior to the interview.

Naomi O'Nolan: Well I have been working in the museum since, for a long long time, since 1995, and at that stage it was housed, well a very small portion of the collection was housed in the University of Limerick, and then it moved here into The Custom House in 1997. So I was first of all working as an administrator and then I kind of moved around into different things, so now I look after exhibitions and collections, and that's my, I started actually looking after the collection in about 2008. Irene and Margret have been Docents ever since the establishment.

Irene Macken: I joined the Docent group when it was established in 1995. Mairéad Dunlevy, who is gone now, was the person who set up the Docent program and as far as we understand it is the only Docent programme in Ireland, they have it in America and that sort of thing but we're the only ones and I suppose in a way she was wonderful that she got us very interested in the collection and in the family that the collection belonged to which was the Hunt family. So, I think we all took a sort of ownership of it really. It's been wonderful and we've learned so much, we've had some really wonderful experts come and talk to us about silver, about ceramics, we've had Timothy Wilson from the Ashmolean, who looked at our Maiolica collection, and we've had various others.

Naomi O'Nolan: Irene is particularly interested in Maiolica, she is our expert.

Irene Macken: Well as I say, ceramics generally, but the Maiolica is the only thing really that I kind of homed in on. So, it's been a wonderful experience.

Margaret Walsh: Well I was the same as Irene, I started from an ad in the paper, a small little corner of the paper, I have it actually still, and my husband saw it and said you might be interested in that. So, it was archaeology, she invited people who were interested to go and help in the Hunt Museum that was housed at the time in UL and we were to do an archaeology course, which we did, so we learnt about the round pot and all the different shards of pottery, the styles, and Mairéad give us great attention, and she made us feel that we were so important and she gave us so much time, and John Hunt junior as well he came and he talked to us about what the collection meant to him growing up and how he lived with it and how they were displayed and how his mother even used different things in domestic use and how you could have a priceless artefact alongside things they would take down to use that would be an artefact as well. And what the Docent programme did for me anyway, that we met so many experts as Irene said, that a lot of us went on to study individual things, Claude went on to study archaeology and silver, I went back to art college as a mature student and did ceramics, designing products, and I have used

the hunt collection as a source of inspiration and guidance for my work. So, a lot of us have gone on to be inspired.

Naomi O'Nolan: I actually think a lot of that came form Mairéad and John Hunt junior.

Margaret Wlash: When the collection was taken from UL and out in here while this building was being reorganised, and was still being built. What happened was they took the collection out because they couldn't display anything in UL, but they put it into the treasury downstairs which was one long gallery at the time.

Naomi O'Nolan: The exhibition gallery.

Margaret Wlash: And I went back to college and I met John Hunt sitting down over the river and he said well what are you doing, and I said it's my first week in college and I was the only mature student in the class and they were all inside in the canteen and I couldn't. I didn't feel confidant to go in I sat and ate my lunch looking over the river and I said I don't know what I'm doing, he said you'll be fine, I said I love the collection now of course it's gone and I don't have it. He gave me permission to go down into the treasury and he gave instructions, that anything I had picked out could be photographed. He was so supportive of any of us and so enthusiastic.

Naomi O'Nolan: Actually, I think that's an important thing. It's a really important thing about the collection they were not a bit possessive of the collection, and when it was put on display in UL John Hunt really wanted to give access to students for education purposes because he felt in Ireland, this is John Hunt senior, he felt in Ireland we were way behind with our heritage and culture because of just being suppressed for so many years. All the grand houses, you know, we didn't own. So, we didn't really want, we were intimidated by, but no it was really very much for education for young people and getting them to appreciate decorative arts as the case is.

Irene Macken: And to make it accessible to the community at large, not just to experts or whatever you know.

Margaret Wlash: And literally and metaphorically it was all accessible to me, and without him I wouldn't have had the encouragement, the kind of, the confidence to go on. And between Mairéad Dunlevy and John Hunt junior they were absolutely stalwarts at helping all of us go on further and bring back, the important thing was that we brought back the information into the Hunt Museum and we now do outreach programmes in education with other people.

Irene Macken: Well this is it and we passed it on, because we have, twice a year we have a recruitment for new docents because people like myself get old and have to move on. So are we constantly refreshing the group with new people. So, the people who have been here for a while can pass on what they have learnt and maybe bits of research they have done and talk about it. So, it's very much a family really and it's kind of ironic because the whole collection came from a family, so that whole atmosphere is still here.

Naomi O'Nolan: And I think that really is important, the fact the way it is displayed here it's not like other museums, it's very personal, very domestic, the cases are small, there are things everywhere, like the delftware and the ceramics together in one room and mixed with other things in another. And this is the way they wanted it because it is the way they had it displayed in their home, and it's also with the interpretation and the labels as well we don't have a lot of information about some of the pieces on labels, but they wanted that to, they wanted people to look at them for their beauty and to see them not all as a whole, say 500 pieces of Asian ceramic together, they wanted them mixed up so that you could look at them differently, you could admire them differently. It is purely, purely aesthetic.

Irene Macken: I think she did say at one stage that it wasn't a museum as much as a house of curiosities you know, because there is a story with everything, so it is totally different really.

Naomi O'Nolan: And I's sure some of the pieces got damaged in their house, I'm absolutely certain, because they allowed everybody to come in and touch. There used to be a Ming bowl, we don't have it now, but there are photographs of the cat in it. You know, so.

Irene Macken: We do collection care here and that's where you will discover the real damage.

Margaret Wlash: But what the, atmosphere that they wanted, why the docents are so important to the museum, and the volunteers and the interns and all the people that come and go and through, is they wanted to make the visitor feel as if they were coming to your house, oh what's that about, you were in a family environment and a domestic environment where you could open a drawer of curiosities and see the things and just to kind of to feel at home really among the collection.

Naomi O'Nolan: Yea and another interesting thing is the fact that we don't know a huge amount about certain objects, over the years we have gathered so much information from visitors who are knowledgeable, like yourself, even coming in and telling us things. Then what the docents have done and learnt, the research they have done over the years. So, a lot of the information and knowledge is still in heads. But we are looking at doing a complete new interpretation of the collection, that's from now into the future.

Irene Macken: And we are very connected with the community at large, both from the schools point of view, we are on schools programmes, for four year olds right through to the leaving cert, and we also have a group dealing with mental health issues, we have a dementia group.

Naomi O'Nolan: The captains room is used a lot for the groups, we are so limited with space, it's the only main room.

Margaret Wlash: We have a great collaboration to with the design, with Limerick school of art and design, with UL, Michael Furmston did a thing with his students, really he's in UL, and he brought them in to look at the collection and to make a mini pocket collection and to pick the things that they were interested in and put them

down in miniature, the pocket collection. And they you've got the students in second year do a painting and they interpret the collection in their way. So, it's very much used by the community, by the education, particularly the education of all the schools, of all levels. Even today I'm meeting Chelsea and we're going through ceramics, their children within a school's community that look at the flora and the fauna depicted in the ceramics.

Stephanie Harper (interviewer): So, it is a way to bring in education programmes then?

Margaret Wlash: Oh yes, because children are visual, they are visually attracted to the animals and the flowers.

Naomi O'Nolan: Like the dog you mentioned, a really really popular piece.

Margaret Wlash: What we do is then, we'll point that out and see what they can be inspired to do and how they would interpret them.

Naomi O'Nolan: But I think too, interestingly enough a couple of years ago we started a new collection of contemporary ceramics, so it's wonderful to see the progression of ceramics right literally down through the centuries.

Irene Macken: And they are all housed in the lower floor. We've just been through a big building programme to replace for health and safety all our electrics and all that have been replaced. So, everything had to be taken out and packed away, so maybe some things have gone back maybe slightly different than they had been before.

Naomi O'Nolan: I know one of your questions was, I don't know where it is now, but you were asking what visitors left with and how they felt, I think visitors love the feeling that it is rather domestic, it's not intimidating, they aren't over awed by it because it's, you know, it's spread out in a way that they're not completely overwhelmed when they see things together. The room [captains room] itself is quite domestic.

Margaret Wlash: Actually we had a meeting the other night, it was the re-opening of the museum, and Lady Dunraven was in, and the sign says you know, do not sit in Lady Dunraven's, and Lady Dunraven sat in her own chair, trebly regal. She is a great supporter, wonderful.

Irene Macken: We also have a very active friends group, who run monthly lectures which are free. And they support both financially and in every other way the running of the museum.

Naomi O'Nolan: And all the lecture series tend to be based around the collection. Some more than others. It doesn't always quite keep the focus of the collection but broadly speaking they do.

Margaret Wlash: We also have mindfulness going ahead and we've poetry, so there's, if your interested in anything you can just drop in and out of them, it's not something that's very rigid. If you feel like there's a poem your inspired to write you

can go to the poetry and the mindfulness group and we have the docents meeting the first Monday of every month, which we're always held up to, kept up to date with what is happening and included in lots of things, very progressive and very inclusive. And we've got a new director now she's great, fantastic ideas, like the objects, some of the objects have been 3d photographed and they've been put up. And there's others, there's volunteers coming in to do that and to get involved in that programme, with experts to upgrade their knowledge and to pass that on eventually.

Naomi O'Nolan: And also I mean she came from a company which I'm sure you've heard of Europeana, it's a digital kind of platform for images and we're doing that with all of our collection, it's all going to be digitised, so it's much more accessible around. Is there anything else you'd like to ask us which we haven't covered. You know the Hunt's also worked, they advised William Burrell on his collection and they have a wonderful East Asian ceramic collection too in Glasgow. They would have a similar type of objects but on a larger scale. As he advised him he advised Sotheby's, and what was the other collection in New York he set up, the Randolph Hearst collection.

Irene Macken: And people like our designer Sybil Connolly, he advised her on what she bought, all her antiquities as well, so they really have filtered into all sorts of areas.

Margaret Wlash: Bunratty Castle too, they were involved in getting all that up you know turning, it was a ruin when I was a child it was a ruin, now it is one of the main attractions tourist attractions done very sensitively.

Naomi O'Nolan: But I think also the quality of the pieces that we have in the collection, they are compared to the Cloisters in New York, to the Burrell and to a few other similar you the Clooney in Paris, I know it's very different but.
Anything that's in storage it's just they are shards from excavations in Bunratty loch or places like that, we don't have full objects in storage. The total collection of all our artefacts is about 2000 pieces, so they are all on display. Obviously pieces that the Hunt's collected to are on loan to the Met and the British Museum and different places like that.
We have a Gauguin and a Renoir in the drawers because they couldn't be out in natural light. But those displays (study displays) were particularly designed for children, so it was this kind of excited curiosity when they opened the drawers, so it was very deliberate.

Margaret Wlash: Kids will do it anyway, if you leave places to roam they'll pull a box or they'll open a drawer, and it does and they'll go over and they get a kind of a surprise.

Naomi O'Nolan: But it had nothing to do with a storage style of display.
Just last year we had a survey done on all the ceramics collection, so it has been, it's all be categorised now, there are a few pieces, the Chinese bowl, so they are top priority. So we are hoping to get conservation done on 6 to 8 of those pieces this year.

Irene Macken: Because we're not, because we're sort of a private museum if you like, we have to be self-funding, so every time we want to do something its rarer to get the grants or to do it, and the maintenance of the building which is very old as well. You know, more money goes out than comes in sometimes so it's a constant sort of effort, to make sure that everything is right, but we've had all metalwork conserved as well, the wooden objects so little by little. We can only do the one thing at a time.

Naomi O'Nolan: But we have a great programme going to with the docents, out housekeeping programme, so we actually assess and check every object is condition reported, all the ceramics are done every year. Which is really good, so we keep a very close eye on the condition and it is, overall I mean, it's in very good condition.

Margaret Wlash: And that's where the friends are very important because they fundraise and they have different activities and entertainment things that help to keep the maintenance of the objects. And doing all that when you think of all the people involved, the docents, the volunteers, the immense value that has on the individual wellbeing and you being feeling useful and able to contribute it cannot be measured, I mean you cannot measure it. If you take a lot, some of us there now could be at home looking at daytime TV, instead of that we're out here talking to lovely people like yourself who are going to promote this museum in a positive light and its given us the kind of the interest to have it and to promote it as well, that can't be measured, its valuable.

Naomi O'Nolan: I think, you know over the years you talk about doing different things and audio-guides were discussed, and it would have lost because the Hunt's really loved the idea of talking to people and talking them through the objects. All the docents do all the guided tours, and it's very much a personal tour, we keep the numbers very small.

Irene Macken: And it's amazing the number of people who take the trouble to write thank you. They get to know the name of the docent and they become kind of, and we get lots and lots of cards.

Naomi O'Nolan: And we keep asking people if they know anything about the collection, they tell us because we're learning all the time.

Margaret Wlash: And John Hunt said, you know I was talking to him and he said, what he loves to see it isn't somebody, which is good as well, he's not differentiating totally, but somebody with an encyclopaedic knowledge of dates and facts and everything else that can overwhelm some visitors but somebody who has an enthusiasm for the piece and can pass that on and that stays in the memory and in the visit, you can bring it up you can think about the person and you can be enthused in return from the visitor, and he thought that was very important.

Irene Macken: I remember saying to Timothy Wilson that was here, because I have no training in the arts at all, I've always had an abiding interest in museums I travelled a little bit with my husband when I was younger, and while he was working I went to the museum because no matter what country I was in I got a sense of the

history and the craft of the country, you know so you get a feeling for the country in what you see in the museum. But I used to say to Timothy, I just don't know and I've no training, and he used to say I don't want you I'm sorry anymore, he said you have a passion and he said sometimes will take you.

Naomi O'Nolan: But your experience, there's nothing like your experience you've been here for so long.

Irene Macken: The learning, the learning that goes on here, from us all the way to everybody that comes in.

Stephanie Harper (interviewer): Do you have a mixed audience then in terms of visitors, across the spectrum?

Naomi O'Nolan: Yes we do, we have so many different kinds of programmes and workshops so we cater literally from toddlers, we have play for toddlers right up to 100 year olds, you know whatever, every age. And the docents are really good at recognising their visitors, the tours, and they adapt the tours to suit them.

Margaret Wlash: I mean you can gather from us, none of us, I mean I did ceramics at college, I just fell in love with it from the collection but our passion, we could talk about the museum our passion, I hope it comes across to you that Irene and myself and Naomi have, because the collection has been good to us. I mean the docents are good for the collection, but the collection in turn has been god to us.

Naomi O'Nolan: When I started I didn't know anything about the collection. I studied History of Art and then Museum Management and practice but the Syrian bowl was one of my and the Chinese bowl were two of my research pieces.

Irene Macken: You can't not be affected by it, you can't.

Naomi O'Nolan: The labels have very little, they are very just descriptive they have just the title or the dates. Some of them could be from information we have got over the years. But then there was a certain amount of information that the Hunt's had, that John Hunt had given with it. But there was research done, a kind of a provenience research done on the objects a number of years ago so new information came to light then about some of the pieces so maybe that's. Everything's on the website, I don't know you've probably checked the objects on the website so all the archival information we have on the objects is available on that website as well. Certain pieces there was more information available on. But there's lots that we've learnt that's not on panels or labels.

Irene Macken: There's a couple of explanations about things because when I was doing the Maiolica about lusterware just to explain what that might be just for our visitors really because you know, somebody comes in and they don't know what Maiolica is and you know so, you have to kind of, you get the name of the thing and what it was used for but as I discovered things we put the labels in the cases so that people if there wasn't, there's usually somebody to ask a question to because we try and maintain somebody on each floor at all times for questions, even if people don't want a tour there'll be somebody there if they want to ask them questions.

Naomi O'Nolan: And we're looking we have an ongoing project now on labelling and interpretation and we're looking at, we're not going to increase the knowledge or the information that's physically on display at the moment but we're talking about having touch screens and more information about each piece and even the countries, just a map of the world where some of the pieces came from because you would say ok where is that and actually bring them back to those places.

Irene Macken: Actually, when I heard you were interested in East Asian, Asian and East Asian, I actually went and got my atlas out. That lady that had given the lecture at the Chester Beatty she was talking about Middle Eastern, so I was at home and I said to my husband what's the difference between East Asian and Middle Eastern. So, we had a look at the map, you know, things like that people will see is written on a label but what picture in your mind do you have. I went there was a wonderful Islamic exhibition at the V&A last year and I went to it and one of the things that struck me was that they had not very big now, little black and white maps, so the places that the objects were from were mapped, so you had this geographical picture in your mind which I think helps people to interpret as well. So we might, I've made a suggestion here so we'll see how we go with it. It might happen.

Margaret Wlash: I as I say I am a ceramic designer and we do exhibitions as well, but Ireland held the international Ceramic festival in Thomastown in Kilkenny and one of the people there is doing the lustre and he did a workshop on it this is one of the tiles he actualy made in the thing and when it comes out its all smoked, you have to clean it and polish it and then the lustre comes through, now there were better ones than that but you can't see what you're getting until you clean it up and this represents the middle of his pots his pots there, he did displays and all that, you know. So, as I say we go to learn like Irene said she found out where it was we did this and we collaborate on a whole bunch of things you know.

Irene Macken: You'll need to do a lot of reading, I'm sure you have.

Margaret Wlash: Having said about your research, recently we did a course on how to do the research and the things we should be looking for in the catalogues and going back and what we should be looking for clues on things and how to go and establish it. So, we've had docent programmes to help us to do this.

Irene Macken: We have ongoing training, all the time. Just depending, usually people will ask, will say can I get a bit of help on doing such and such so the staff are really wonderful they bring these experts and we get to learn, you know. So, that goes on as well as the public learning, we're learning all the time as well.

Naomi O'Nolan: We're a hugely under resourced museum, staff wise. We're resourceful, it can be resourced in lots of ways but yea.

Margaret Wlash: But as well as that for people like me who took time out, who kind of needed to get their bearings coming back into the museum and getting confidant again there was a docent re-education programme put on as well for us and we were taken around by a museum guide who took us all around and we did our own kind of enactment for her and we got assessed on it, so we're constantly, we're not just

thrown in the deep end, we're not being looked after by the museum we're very much being encouraged and upgrading our skills and what we should be kind of elevating and what we just can kind of just comebacker. It's been extremely valuable to me anyway, as to coming back to be re-introduced as a docent again.

Irene Macken: It's quite amazing what's achieved here actually with the small number of staff, it's absolutely amazing, amazing. Talk about multitasking, we have the peak of multitaskers here I this museum.

Naomi O'Nolan: I think sometimes we do too much but anyway.

Margaret Wlash: And we're challenged as well, you have to be challenged and that's why I say it does so much for us as well. Because when your challenged you bring cells are there and we challenge each other, not overtly but we just say I have to being my speed up to that, challenge ourselves more than being challenged of you know what I mean.

Irene Macken: It's great super pleased to be here, and to be involved.

Interview with Jessica Baldwin (Head of Collections and Conservation) and Mary Redfern (Curator of East Asia)
Chester Beatty Library
Tuesday 15th January 2019
10am

Note: I did not need to verbally ask the interview questions I had set in this case as the interviewees preferred to print and read over them prior to the interview.

Jessica Baldwin: So, my name is Jessica Baldwin and I am head of collections and conservation. So, my role in the museum is managing the collections staff so in this museum that includes the curators of the collection, our registrar and obviously the curators manage the curatorial assistants underneath that and we have a registrar, a conservation department and then the education department including our reference library reading room services. There is four or five digital, so it is the largest part of our staff at the moment, we are growing our digital side which is very exciting we can talk about that. My background actually is in conservation so slightly unusual within this museum, the previous two head of collections were also the curator. So, I also hold head of conservation which I think has made it an easy transition because I set up the conservation department here in 2003 within that I worked with all the curators and with all the collections so it gives me a nice general overview. I don't hope to be a specialist in any collection but I hope that it gives me a sense of the size of the collection, and where really, we need to focus.

Mary Redfern: And also, the accreditation.

Jessica Baldwin: So, I lead the museum accreditation, which we achieved full accreditation. We were awarded it in 2014, and we have just maintained our accreditation and again received the award in 2018 so that's been hugely important as far as establishing policies and it's set the sort of bar for the minimum policies, but then we've been building on them as we've grown. So, at this point in time the Chester Beatty has moved from its original location in Shrewsbury Road where it was established, and opened to the public in 1954, and then it moved here in 2000 and we are coming up to its nineteenth birthday here on this site, 7th February, which is our founder's birthday, and we have three curators for three distinct collection areas. So, Mary is East Asian, Curator Dr Jill Unkel is the curator for the Western collections and Moya Carey who is the curator for the Islamic collections and then Celine Ward our reference librarian who also looks after some four and a half thousand rare books under the reference library, but she doesn't want to be called a curator.

Mary Redfern: So, I like to still claim that I am new but that is wearing thin now, especially that we have a newer curator on the block. So, I am Mary Redfern, I joined the Chester Beatty in October 2015 which means I am not new anymore. So, I have been here just over three years. Before this I was doing a PhD on Japanese ceramics at the University of East Anglia. Before that I had been working at museums in the UK, so National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, V&A London and Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery which changes its name every three years or so, so I am not sure what it is called. So, I had always worked with East Asian collections broadly, but actually my original undergraduate degree was archaeology.

I kind of moved into East Asian studies after that, living in Japan and doing different things. So my role in the museum, it's always broader, I think the curatorial role than what people expect. But I think principally we're just working very closely with the collection, so researching the collection, developing materials for displays, choosing things for displays, but also trying to work with all the different stakeholders, funders, researchers, the public, events programming, sort of working with everybody within the institution as well as a number of people outside the institution. But always trying to sort of best see the potential that's in the collection, whether that's the scholarship, whether that's just finding something really interesting which needs conservation work and then working with the conservators or with development to get funding to do a new project. So it's a fun role, diverse role, and one that keeps me on my toes. So for the east Asian collections, as Jessica said we've got three curators, so my background is more in Japanese art, Japanese is the language I can read and speak, but as I said I've always worked with East Asian collections and that's quite typical in fact many places I'm sure you'll be working with don't have a specialist for East Asia. So it just depends on the scale of an institution and really as to where that fits, where I've worked there's always been an East Asian specialist, so Bristol it was Kate Newnham as the East Asian curator, the V&A obviously had a whole team of people, masses of them. In Edinburgh we had two curators and then I was assistant curator for East Asia there, but it does vary a lot. Here also, the definition of East Asia is somewhat wider in that its China, Japan, Korea, although we don't have very much Korean we have one historic Korean thing which Beth thinks is Chinese, but we do have some contemporary Korean ceramics, but also what is unusual for the sort of bracket of East Asia is that it includes South East Asian material so Thai, Burmese, but also some of the South Asian collection so if its Indian Islamic it will go to the Islamic curator but if its Buddhist Indian collections or Hindu Indian collections those come under the East Asian. So that's the really unusual bit, but it does fit in terms of obviously we do have the Buddhist collections from across East Asia and South-East Asia so that's sort of I think why the decision was made, before my time. We all have that level of diversity I think as well, so Jill looking after the Western collections it goes from Egyptian papyrus to twentieth century French fashion, so we've all got a wide range. Were all covering quite big ranges, which is challenging sometimes but also means we've got some opportunities to see things in an interesting way.

Jessica Baldwin: So there are two different types of exhibitions that we hold here of which you'll be very much aware. We have our two what we call permanent galleries, I think we are trying to look at another term because it is misleading in that the themes within those two galleries remain relatively static however the objects within there change. So, in fact just yesterday Mary and the conservation team were busy changing the scrolls in the Japanese section. So, I should rewind slightly and say that the total number of the collection is just under twenty-five thousand objects which is fairly staggering for a personal collection. We are not actively acquiring, it doesn't mean that we don't acquire but compared to the National Museum or a number of the national collections if we collect a handful of things a year that's quite a busy year for us, we don't have an acquisition budget, and as you'll probably have seen from our policies online we are very much focused on retaining the integrity of the collection, because Chester Beatty was very careful about how and why he collected materials, so we are very cautious to keep that intact. So that is the challenge we don't have to face, multiple acquisitions joining the collection. The

challenge for us as far as exhibitions are concerned is that we are constrained by our space, so as I say we have two permanent galleries and then we have one temporary gallery. At any one time we have about one percent of the collection on display, so really our temporary gallery was established with a view to offering rotating, changing exhibitions. The majority of the time, those exhibitions are drawn one hundred percent form our own collection. So, it's a chance to focus on, and introduce the public, to an area of the collection which they haven't seen and we have had some great from the Japanese collection there. Most recently we have had the surimono exhibition that was curated and we'll have a Japanese print exhibition which we can discuss happening next year, then, so either they are one hundred percent drawn from the collection on one area, one hundred percent drawn from the collection across the areas. Including the exhibition which you can have a chance to see here, 'A Gift of a Lifetime', and we've done a number of those shoes we've done 'Blue' curated by Colm Toibin and we did 'A-Z' using the alphabet as a framework for showing the diversity of the collection and now we have 'A Gift of a Lifetime', which is commemorating fifty years since Chester Beatty gave the collection to the nation. Then we have exhibitions where we, also we borrow items as well, either its ninety percent our own collection then we bring in a handful say of textiles if we did a Parisian fashion type of show and we borrowed collections from the Ulster Museum. Or we borrowed the John Thomson photography exhibition which was based on China, again we balanced with materials, Chinese textiles. Or we do one hundred percent borrowed. For example, Hong Ling or we borrowed the Cloisonné, so actually some quite good examples. And our new website lists all of those, so, if you need to get any dates or figures or if your trying to contrast how many. What we tend to do is to try to rotate the curators, give curators a rest, I mean they are all always planning But when poor Mary signed her contract we said oh and by the way we have an incoming loan of Hong Ling Chinese paintings and we would like you to do a Japanese exhibition to celebrate sixty years of diplomatic relations, off you go. So, and she's still here. So that's how the sort of over planning goes, and within our permanent as you are aware we have the sacred traditions gallery on the top floor and the arts of the book on the first floor. When we first opened in 2000 the sacred traditions opened with it and that hasn't changed significantly. The arts of the book when we opened in 2000 was called artistic traditions, and when we took an exhibition in 2007, we took the Leonardo codex exhibition, manuscripts from Bill Gates, and order to take that and the crowds that we were expecting. The old layout was extremely modular, quite similar to the second-floor gallery, so there was lots of small areas, it was decided to strip out the entire gallery and open up the display. So, while the planning was in process for the Leonardo we introduced new cases, those big large non reflective glass display cases went in and then after that two large temporary exhibitions went in, there was 'Telling Tales' a Chinese calligraphy exhibition from Shanghai and then a Persian exhibition went in and then we added new cases, the cases where you see the scrolls are in and the gallery was redesigned. At that time, the three curators very much followed a geographical trail as you will have seen, well certainty it is a little inconsistent to be honest, it is not that we are passing the buck because we weren't, the curators have all since left, but certainly on the Islamic and East Asian sections they were very much following a kind of a geographical sense.

Mary Redfern: Geographic and then there are themes within that so, but part of it is also working to the strengths of the collection, so the collection we have is not as big

as somewhere like the British Museum or the V&A so we wouldn't be able to do an encyclopaedic piece, the Japanese material we have is mostly Edo period, the Chinese is mostly Qing (Ch'ing) with some Ming dynasty so that's why it's sort of Japan under the shoguns and then dynastic China, but that is also why we have arts of the book because these are sort of the key aspects of the collection.

Jessica Baldwin: And the main thing for us is the ability to rotate, because if you focus it too much on a specific object then in twelve months or eighteen months' time you have to replace that and it's also down to budgets to be brutally honest. We have a very modest budget that we get, we have a grant from the government and then we fundraise to sponsor our exhibitions but it is very modest, so we can't simply afford in time or energy to strip out so that's why the majority of our exhibition budget goes on the, changing the temporary gallery two or three times a year.

Mary Redfern: Yea, I think that's the key thing, and that's the key thing I found coming here from other places is that the, having the permanent galleries but rotating them on a sort of nearly annual basis, that makes a big difference, in terms of the way the individual objects are selected because they fit into an existing framework but you're not able to sort of, say we have a Daoism and Confucianism case at the moment I'm thinking of the future of this case, we don't actually have a huge amount of material in the collection that relates to that sort of theme, so we've worked out a rotation that is good for now but long term we night need to reconsider because it limits what we can do and we don't want to be because the works here are more sort of works on paintings so they need to be sensitised compared to when you are working with ceramics and you can leave it on display because it is quite happy. Here we do need to be thinking about having a flexibility, so I think that having the overarching themes and then the sort of geographic within those overarching themes and then sub-themes gives us a framework that we can then bring different individual objects into, so I think that's sort of what the main drive is.

Jessica Baldwin: I should say, because we are in an exciting position, our previous curator of the Islamic collection retired in July 2017 and because of the challenges of finding an Islamic specialist in Ireland, you can't is the short answer, our new curator we had to sort of wait eighteen months for the new curator to take up post. So, but for the head of collections and the curatorial team we are in an exciting position, where we have three new curators 'new' in post and we're actually planning to sort of pull apart the design and interpretation of both the galleries and look at how we might reconsider how they are displayed in the future, and I can't really say any more than that. Again, you've probably seen the policies online but I do have our exhibition policy which is from 2013, but its due for renewal this year and reading it last year I realised we need to sort of shake the whole thing up and start it again. So, it is interesting, so we will be interested to see what you come up with. We'll just be copying and pasting from your PhD. But, I guess on a practical scale for any museum budget unfortunately has to drive what is achievable and resources as well. As Mary says we have one lone curator who is dealing with annual rotations, temporary exhibitions, researchers, trying to do their own research, answering questions for the general public and scholars, handling reader requests it's quite difficult to, its busy.

Mary Redfern: Just to reiterate, we've got the two overarching themes which is very much across collections for the two galleries, and geographical religion within those, and sub-themes within those again so it's kind of switching between thematic and geographic to try and, I think really it's to try and give it a legibility as well so that the visitor can find their way to something that they enjoy and find things that bounce of each other, but these are all things that are open to thinking in the future. But for Chester Beatty's life I think really that's got quite a limited role in the galleries. So the main space, obviously we've got the current 'A Gift of a Lifetime' exhibition so that's slightly different. Really, it's the AV downstairs where we introduce Chester Beatty, and in the galleries its only on in Arts of the Book we have one case and one panel talking about Chester Beatty specifically and then in Western there's a case as well talking about his life and the library as well there.

Jessica Baldwin: The overriding importance is the artefact I think in the scheme of things because really, as fascinating as we find when and where he collected it, and that is an integral piece, when we were coming to design this exhibition, when we didn't know what shape it would take, actually following the narrative of his life was utterly fascinating to us but became extremely repetitive. So actually, what is extraordinary is saying that this one man, he didn't just focus on medieval books of hours, his breadth and depth and it suddenly became, if we tried to do it chronological it became hard for the visitor to really engage in why they should come and see it, because we had to build it from, ok this is the object the rarest and most important object to survive and then we've also added ok this is where he acquired it, this is where he.

Mary Redfern: I think the importance here is really placed on the collection, really more than the collector in terms of its display. It's such a unique collection with such incredible things.

Jessica Baldwin: Certainly, if we had the space we would like to curate a story of Chester Beatty room, in the old imagining of the 2000 space you came in and there was a central story of Chester Beatty. So we had a bank of old display cases from Shrewsbury Road, with photographs and archives of him. But with the opening up of the space that has been lost, and now we are really looking at how we can digitally get Chester Beatty back into the story line, and I guess really that shift has gone into the importance of the object and its context within, I guess the whole show the arts of the book is very loose because we have dragon robes and snuff bottles.

Mary Redfern: So, the original design of the galleries, well for 2008 arts of the book design was done with an external design company (Event) and I don't know exactly what decisions were made then so that's the first thing to say is I don't know what was the decision making process then, but in terms of what we do now obviously following the same framework but if there's something we particularly want to change we quietly ask Jessica, but we can change.

Jessica Baldwin: And we have changed, obviously we've added the Irish Language under the equality of the languages act, so that happened.

Mary Redfern: Yea, so when I am doing the rotations sometimes the spaces just call for one object and that's sort of the, you know, it's fine. But sometimes we've also

got groupings, and when I'm looking at those groupings I'll look at it slightly differently, so I'll look for things that will support each other. So, that people can see different things that sort of relate to the same thing, even if it's quite subtle, I like doing things very subtly. But so the scrolls we've just put out, we've got this incredible collection of Japanese scrolls, mostly narrative scrolls, and I've done, the first rotation I did I focused on the tale of genji, actually because it wasn't something I had studied very much and I needed to know, so I was like quick crash course in the tale of genji and also we have an incredible collection and we have so many different versions of the tale of genji, we had good books, a fantastic dowry case, lovely scrolls and sort of different things to tie it together but also then show the importance of this masterpiece really. And the current rotation is monsters, so this is also thinking slightly wider, so in this particular instance the reason I chose monsters is partly because they are great fun and everyone loves them, but also we've got Worldcon coming to Dublin this summer and so I thought if we've got Worldcon there with people who are interested in sci-fi and comics and things, we've got these lovely scrolls which are full of lovely Japanese monsters. So, that's just sort of something I thought of.

Jessica Baldwin: Certainly, with science week or certain science festivals we would, and then say with the five hundredth anniversary of the reformation, we would. We try, and Chinese New Year.

Mary Redfern: Yea, and it gives us sort of a nice idea as well, because the other thing is when we're only displaying such a tiny fragment of the collection, obviously there are things that we want people to see, the sort of stars of the collection, but we also want to find things that people haven't seen or where we've got new research on something. The thing is we have a lot of research happening on the collection, not really just by ourselves, a lot of it is by external researchers. So, trying to bring that knowledge back in, so that we can, yea if there's new scholarship. I'm thinking of the Mani stuff.

Jessica Baldwin: Then they will highlight the rarity of something, or cause, then our curators to refocus. They will think oh.

Mary Redfern: Yes, and we've just had someone do research on an earthquake scroll that we have. So, it's scroll showing the 1855 earthquake in Edo it would have been then, and she is showing that this scroll would have actually been produced to commemorate a wedding, which is not what you would expect. But, its brilliant because she has unravelled the whole history of it, and we knew when Beatty had bought it but we didn't know beyond that. So it's sort of, having things like that gives us ideas as well, for the rotations.

Jessica Redfern: And the timing of the kaemono, because that also contained monsters so we made sure it was on for Halloween, and the education program was drawn out of the children animating or making masks of the monsters. So there is there's some subtle, and we're constantly trying to find other themes that will also assist our education program and assist our promotion so that we can say come in and see. When we had the fashion plate exhibition, we made sure we timed with fashion week that the other fashion material in the Western collection. So that you could see from the sixteen-hundreds fashion plates or images. And then we also do

use the non-permanent gallery for in focus shows, the adventures of Taware Toda which was just taken down, so that was a set of three scrolls, so it was conserved, fully conserved that means relining the scrolls completely in lydon. So when that project was completed we did a sort of mini exhibition of them, really in focus display in the gallery.

Jessica Baldwin: And this year we are using it again because our temporary exhibition, planning for that takes about three years, two, three years, for the planning for the temporary gallery, so it gives an alternative option for doing a small in focus show, and in fact that's happened a lot in the East Asian, we've had ceramics, we had seven-hundred snuff bottles one year, that was for a convention of snuff bottle fanciers, so this year we are going to look at the Western collection and put some of our Manichaean and papyrus, again that's timing with a papyrus conference that we will host here, and then a seminar on Manichaean, which is a extremely scholarly response to a twelve year research project that's been published, so we try and catch those deadlines. Another way to re-envisage the space, so that area will look different, the normal visitor may think that that's always how it looks but they will chance upon the first early introduction to manuscript making and then to the papyrus collection. So, we always try to refresh it and make it look different.

Mary Redfern: I think because we have a lot of repeat visitors locally as well as obviously tourists coming just once, so it's a way to involve everyone and refresh things, bring things out that haven't been seen before, and or recontextualize something which has been seen before as well. I think that's all fun.

So, other things in terms of the spatial relations, aesthetics do come into it sometimes. So, for example the Japanese prints would be the one I would say I've had the most fun with lately. If you look at the Japanese prints in the arts of the book there is a lot of diagonals, and it's actually that's just me sitting going I like all these things because they relate to warriors and that's what I wanted it to do, and then I was looking through it going I'm getting some really nice diagonal lines here so let's just bring those out and so yea aesthetics always come into it to some degree. But obviously if we are putting one scroll in a case then we are not thinking so much about that in that sense. And then also just where the objects lend themselves to interacting with other objects, so the Daoism, Confucianism case in sacred at the moment has a Chinese printed biography of Confucius and then beside it the Japanese version of the same text, to really show basically that there is an interaction happening there. Sometimes we find that we have objects in the collection that really speak to each other, and that gives us a nice thing to work with as curators. Or, just as I said, reinforcing things, so we've got a couple of things in the Chinese Buddhist case about Lohan's which is something people won't be familiar with but if they see two sets of objects and two sets of labels, it kind of reinforces that understanding of it all. So it is, yea, various considerations.

Jessica Baldwin: And then obviously, the practical is the size of case. That is a challenge say for hanging scrolls especially. And when we're looking at, we're going to be working on a long-term expansion plan, because the challenge of our temporary gallery is that it's only a hundred square metres give or take, our permanent galleries are four-hundred square metres and really to take in a travelling

exhibition we need a minimum of four-hundred square metres, so we need that as a minimum size. So, it does restrict, we can't take large travelling shows, and we can't create large travelling shows to then travel. So, it's one of our ambitions which would potentially see our current temporary exhibition maybe turning into a life of Chester Beatty space, and then we would like to create again a large temporary exhibition space. So, then and right down to how many objects can you fit in a case, without it looking as if you've just squished everything in and closed the door, and having enough space for the labels, the legibility of the labels as well. The same with lighting, about fifty/ fifty (for practical and for the effect). It's not really the effect, we aren't trying to make it purposefully dim. Practical reasons, the constraint of the lighting system we've inherited, and then obviously our primary concern is preservation of the object given that they will be on for a minimum of twelve months, and then the practical design of the cases. We do deliberately keep the papyrus low on the second floor because it is so rare, and it is so constantly on display and so the light levels, that is where there is conscious decision. As you go into the sacred there is the space with the AV rituals running, and that was meant to give an opportunity for large groups of school children to quieten and calm down, whether they do or not, or whether they are even aware. But by putting very meditative music on, to stop them, and again the lobby is to create that barrier, so you go through a lobby its slightly quieter, you don't hear the nose of the atrium, and its' sort of reducing it. So, those are our conscious kind of building decisions, and certainly the sacred is much darker, the arts of the book is much more open, and the spaces are much more contemplative.

Mary Redfern: And the music, I think the music is very much contemplative.

Jessica Baldwin: The colours were deliberately chosen, especially for the sacred you have the red of the lacquer, the green of the Islamic and then the purple sort of Christian. And those sections have the beautifully carved, architectural things. We are looking at how we can integrate new digital technology because the AV's on both floors are of a time so that's our next challenge, is to introduce touch screens and that sort of technology which we'll be looking at. So, given to the choice of colours, yes I guess the deep blue also sort of a building colour, that dark blue you'll see it on the metalwork on the staircases, we've moved away from it on the rebranding, we have a very vibrant green that we do not plan to put in the cases or the carpets, that could cause all sorts of problems, but yes the colours are very themed, so on the arts of the book you'll see the red silk, again the silk was used because it is very lustrous and it's a natural fibre. Then the grey which was chosen just to disappear, so you shouldn't really be too aware, the last thing we want people to do is to just only focus on the colour. And that's another reason why our blocks and cradles are predominately Perspex, so that you shouldn't be conscious that there's, it shouldn't be dispended. And in fact, I have had criticism from people who have said well why don't you have an glass on your cases because of the non-reflective glass, I've had people go why's there no, oh and poke it, why would you have no glass. So, with the newer cases which came in in 2007 they are not non-reflective, again to try and remove that barrier which does cause people to bang their heads. There's pros and cons as far as it goes. So, I guess the colours are supposed to be very deep and rich and I guess the palette of the temporary gallery is always drawn on the objects. With the gift of a lifetime for example, we went for a copper featured colour to reflect the

fact he was the copper king, and the walls are very dark because we wanted the objects to float, treasury feel basically.

Mary Redfern: Full spotlights of things emerging, and also so that they could stand on their own, and the other aspect being because it's across the collections, sort of choosing one colour that will work for everything is hard.

Jessica Baldwin: We are working on a Thai exhibition, so we will have two back to back East Asian, South-East Asian exhibitions. On the Thai collection that palette will be very bright, deep, reds, greens, golds co it will be totally different. With the Cöetivy exhibition, so that was showing fifteenth century French, we went for a very dark blue.

Mary Redfern: With surimono we did a very dark purple. I like dark colours with the display of things generally but, that's also it's a nice colour for surimono and its there in the prints but it's also got a suggestion of spring mists. But we also used very expensive gold wallpaper which I used on the panels, the two panels at the beginning, because the think was the prints, the nice thing about surimono's was that they were privately published and they used metallic inks and they also do embossing. So, I told the designers I really wanted to find some like gold for the walls but gold paint never really looks right so we were just scanning through wallpaper catalogues and picking up the paint samples. And I was like that one, it was great because it was actually rather than just being flat gold it had a kind of hexagonal pattern slightly raised in it which really looked like the embossing as well, so Jessica let me have it, only two piles, two piles of golden wallpaper. But yea, so we think about a lot of different things and so while yea, I wasn't necessarily here for the earlier decisions on the permanent galleries it's something we are always thinking about and discussing with designers in terms of.

Jessica Baldwin: And especially in the permanent because it has to be something that works across all of them, so I guess that looking at the sacred that was the way, and looking at the arts of the book, and blue silk is used in the Islamic, again to break it, to give it a sense of the different collections. So, that's the interesting thing, and I don't know what our conclusion would be as to what is, and we meet at the end of the month and we sort of say, because both those floors their curatorially divided, so its Western Islamic, East Asian and that's repeated on the sacred gallery and that works and has worked for twenty years, is it always going to work. So, it's that kind of well we're going to throw it up into the air and all say how would we see it, because if we fundamentally change, I think that there's more opportunity on the arts of the book say potentially, if you wanted to put calligraphy against calligraphy. I don't know or, we're not really sure how we're going to. But again, we have to keep saying how are we going to rotate this, how will it work. Because it's no good having the most coherent sets or display for an opening one year and then the curators not being able to change it within that.

Mary Redfern: That can be a real challenge for museums everywhere, so if you kind of, not overdesign, but if you really, really want to design for specific objects, and it's been in Edinburgh to the extent of actually building niche cases that were the right size for particular things to go in them. You can't, it limits you.

Jessica Baldwin: I don't know if you saw the Christian area, we had the earliest surviving fragment, but it had been on display for sixteen years, and we had criticism for taking it off but the poor thing had been on display for sixteen years and that had exactly that stand alone little case in the corner, so that gave the curator who had taken over the role quite recently, an opportunity to reimagine the whole of the Christian section, so distinct areas have been changed subtly, and unless you were really studying you wouldn't really be aware of those. So certainly, none of the galleries are as they were when we opened in 2000, it's just the are structures certainly are the same, the second floor are the same. The lighting, is for the preservation of the objects first and foremost and then yes, we try and make it look attractive. We spend, its trickiest in the temporary gallery when you have multiple frames and you are trying to get a nice even lighting, and so we spend an awful lot of time up and down ladders. But yes, the lighting is kept dim for preservation.

The short answer is yes (regarding question 6), all the curators did travel for the first imagining and for the displays, and they were looking at not only content but also case design, we did a number of visits. I certainly went on one where we went to the V&A and the British Museum, to look at their cases. We went to a number of different institutions to look at how they were manging display of those collections.

Mary Redfern: And then one sort of very specific one that we've been doing for a number of years now, the Thangkas in the sacred traditions gallery. The textile conservator we work with is fantastic and has particular interest in Thangkas and so she has developed not only good ways of mounting them using magnets, which is fantastic, but also she's very specific about hanging the veils, so previously a lot of the Thangkas were just draped and the veil had been tucked behind, but she was like no it should be like this, and she spends a lot of time very carefully.

Jessica Baldwin: I call it 'poofing', and it drives her crazy, carefully 'poofed'. But they are just carefully folded, and they are supported along that, and because they are, traditionally we were handing them from their hanger we were supporting the full weight on a rod, with a Perspex sort of back, then obviously some of them we knew were getting damaged where you hang them, so what we did was we spent ages coming up with different solutions and came up with this, so they are suspended by magnets, actually if you look closely the hanging looks like its hanging from that, but actually there is a little cord that drapes it up, so it has the look but all the weight is taken across the top and then at the bottom so.

Mary Redfern: Just to give you an idea of what goes into that the magnets are all carefully wrapped in coloured Japanese paper, if they are visible. So it is all these little things that's, gives the.

Jessica Baldwin: And they have little sleeves with magnets behind them. The use of the magnets is preservation and then the 'poofing', displaying in the traditional ritual way, is to follow how they would be shown. But literally they would be folded up, and then pulled through a hanging cord, which quite often ours are missing because they kept doing that and then that's very aggressive because that silk is the most delicate, because its thin, so that's why we create a fake kind of support that does that sort of handing, drooping thing. The music/ chanting in that space has been there since the start, again it is quite meditative. Its motion censored, and it's on the Christian

section as well, there's Christian chants so again I guess we wanted to do this because we wanted to introduce a sense of respect, and it does stop people chatting.

Mary Redfern: That gallery always has more of a sort of calm.

Jessica Baldwin: and because you have the sort of prayer running on repeat, so in the Islamic collection you have again, and I guess that that kind of mosque setting for the case.

Mary Redfern: It's very architectural. The sort of the overall design there. Its atmospheric, trying to create an atmosphere.

Jessica Baldwin: It has been, I've read a number of articles where it has been referred to, I read an exhibition one, which I'm sue is an article you have seen, many many times about the presentation of East Asian collections and it made a reference to that. And even that, was in 2014 or something, where they were using it as a good example. So it has stood the test of time, practically we would look at creating more exhibition space, there's a little too much architectural, because actually if you look at the Islamic the cases are very much pushed to the size and their quite small, so for us we would like to bring in the collection more, so that we can show more of the collection. So, we might look at how it is potentially displayed.

Mary Redfern: Yea, and maybe for the East Asian side, so you've got a sort of geographic range from China, Japan and Tibet, South-East Asia and then the South Asia religions, but each one is very much contained in a little sort of pod, because of very sort of architectural divisions so that's something yes, for the future.

Jessica Baldwin: To help make those connections which are easier on the first floor.

Mary Redfern: I think just the flow of the space and, for example with the display of the Tibetan Buddhist material that there is room, you've got space for the labels of the Thangkas but for everything else the labels go on a separate little sheet, because there really isn't space and I think that giving a bit more breathing space to a few more of those things would be nice, and height for Japanese hanging scrolls.

Jessica Baldwin: Yes, there isn't any depth, you'll see a lot of the cases are sort of thigh level so you can't hang them, which is a challenge.

I am always curious as to why people come to the Chester Beatty and I guess what we would hope is the breadth and depth of the collection, sort of world artistic and religious. I'd hoped that they would find something that they weren't expecting to find, I'd hope they would take away a favourite object. We have visitors who just come, you know come to see an object. See the papyrus, see the Japanese prints.

Mary Redfern: See the Japanese Buddhist statue. I was up there looking at, clearly taking measurements through the glass and someone was there asking me. She was like, what do you do and what are you doing, I explained that I was just planning because we change the objects, and I am just planning what would fit here, and she said you're not going to move that statue are you, because I keep coming back to

look at it whenever I just need to calm down. And I'm just like, no don't worry that one's staying, it's fine it's these ones that are going to change, and she was like good. So it is people have a very, and I was the same when I, the reason I got into museum work to start with was I did archaeology in Edinburgh and it was down the road from the museum, and the museum was free, so lunch times when I was in one of the nearby departments I would go into the museum and sit and just look at this amazing Japanese bronze Buddha and it was just that experience, being able to go back there, sit there, have that moment of calm, go back out do stuff, yea, and then finding curious things. They had a gallery which is gone now, of monkey skeletons, very much skeletons but posed like they were swinging through the trees. So, I think things like that, that you would sort of find and discover, so something that inspires, something that interests, `and something that engages people. I think more than wanting it to be, for me I think it's trying to not have things too didactic, that the viewer must learn that this period lasts from here to here, but more so that you'll find something which you are interested in.

Jessica Baldwin: Learn about a world culture, learn about a culture that you didn't know about, and hopefully finding a connection, because the way we are so close together unlike the huge museums where you do move from China to, you know you have to move physically along the way. Because then you move away from one space to another, so then if you have seen the case on Chinese calligraphy then you're going to see Persian calligraphy.

Mary Redfern: Sort of resonances.

Jessica Baldwin: And the materials are all pretty much the same across all these cultures, it's just how they are manipulated, how they're used and how they're, the skills rise and fall and I think it's.

Mary Redfern: I think more it'd definitely the objects, the cultures and the religions than Beatty per-say. And we want to explain Beatty because you know, people will always ask why is this stuff here, how did it get here, and you know it's a great story as well but really the objects, the collections, the contexts, the cultures are coming above that.

Jessica Baldwin: I think the general consensus is positive, I mean we're in the ninety percent, if you need the, I know we have to report on that to various different supporters and benefactors, so I could give you the, I'll just cut and paste the thing, you know x number of Trip Advisors and so on. I mean I think Trip Advisor is we're moving away from that, because that has become extremely divisive in the way their algorithms are measured now, because they own tour companies so they are very divisive. However, even saying that we're still in the top ten, you know for years we've been the only National cultural institution in the top ten for Dublin.

Mary Redfern: And the gross of visitor figures as well.

Jessica Baldwin: Yes, well I guess the visitor figures are very hard, it is one of our primary ways that we follow it, so we are at three hundred and fifty thousand. But, the problem of doing that is then when you fall one year, you think it's all doom and gloom. So, we've been lucky in that we've had a steady, steady rise we are

plateauing at around three hundred and fifty thousand. But we do think we are constrained by the physical site, the positive is that we have such a protected site. What people love about us is our location, in kind of an oasis within Dublin castle and within the city which is also one of our negatives because people do literally walk past the gates, and we're not in control of the signage within Dublin castle. Also access for groups, we don't have parking, but we are constantly working towards using new technologies. We're using beacon technology that hopefully somebody who walks near Trinity will see hay have you thought about Chester Beatty on an app which will be launched this year, which again we are hoping will help inform the story of Chester Beatty and the collection and give up to date information on what's on display, which will also include, they are currently carrying out mapping so you will be able to do a virtual tour of the galleries and then stop at a particular case and learn more about that case. So, we're looking at, to really anchoring and using technology to help us with the visitor experience because we can only show what we can show. So, we launched in December the new website, so it is the first time we have the collection online, which is very exciting, it's still it's not perfect, it's still developing but its growing and we have in house photographers who have been working properly full time since January last year. So, and for the first time the collections is becoming accessible and that has already shown a new audience and is connecting you know research questions and very much, we commissioned a documentary which I don't know if you have had a chance to see, I'll send you the link, it will be a secret SQuirreL link which will only be open for twenty-one days, sorry unfortunately, well not unfortunately it was co-sponsored by RTE so it is only available on the RTE player, but we are making it available for ten days only at the end of the month. So that was an hour-long documentary focussing on the life of Chester Beatty, so again that's created a lot of interest in people saying oh I must go back in and again I can give you a breakdown on visitor numbers if you are interested in demographics of people visiting. Just, as far as countries that visit, because I don't want to quote, I mean the, yea I won't quote because there is a specific, and I know that the majority of our Irish visitors are from Dublin, but I know we have breakdowns of whether its predominately, we've seen a sharp fall in UK visitors since all the sterling issues and I think that that's across Dublin. But we do see by osmosis the same sort of effects that all the other National Museums, when they had a particularly busy year in 2016 when the year of commemoration for the sixteen rising was on, but that was across all Ireland so.

The community groups weren't involved in the formation of the current exhibitions, but they are very much involved in the development of those in focus, we very much put things on for the Chinse New Year.

Mary Redfern: The partnership with the Japan Foundation (surimono exhibition) really came about with working with the Chinese embassy, again on the sixth anniversary of diplomatic relations.

Jessica Baldwin: The, working with the department of foreign affairs, we do, we are very active in working the embassies, our own embassies travelling out. The ambassadors would have routine tours, we have an ambassador going to Ethiopia, this is unusual in that this is a museum where you can come and see, it doesn't matter which country you're going to, we've got it, and very much with the new Japanese, ambassador to Japan and the previous ambassador to Japan were very

active. Say the director was invited to Asia to speak, and we had an award from Japan for diplomatic relations.

Mary Redfern: Yes, from the foreign minister.
Jessica Baldwin: We've had Thai princesses, Japanese princesses, we've had endless ambassadors come.

Mary Redfern: And then we've sort of the more community groups as well, so the Thai there was Temiya the Mute Prince publication done with the Thai community groups and then Dublin Chinese New Year is the main one, we'll tie in the rotation of the dragon robe. Also, a lot of programming is involved.

Jessica Baldwin: So, there was festivals, we've partnered with Experience Japan, which happens in April it's a festival, we are working with a group called Mother Tongues which is working on exactly that shared languages, so multi-lingual educational programmes and there's a publication based on our collection, and we have community ambassador tours which are carried out in different languages, we have Japanese and Chinese tours, Irish, and we're trying to expand those Arabic. So, then we are also conscious of our younger and older generations, so we start with Tiny Toes which is pre-school programming and we do the Silk Worm Club which is six to eleven, and then we do the teens club which is divided into two because teens are temperamental so it's twelve to fourteen and the fifteen to seventeen because it's not cool to be mixed if your fifteen to seventeen, and then we work with Bealtaine festival for the older generation and with our dementia friendly tours as well, so we try and involve communities that way. We are working with Dublin City Council, they have a national neighbourhood project where they fund community lead projects, where the community says what they want to do and they're partnered with, this year we're partnered with the national archives, so we're looking at working with community groups potentially, we're looking, last year we looked at storytelling, shared storytelling, this time we're maybe talking about how you curate your own collection, how you archive your own story and how would you want an exhibition of your life to say about you. So, we're always trying to do those type of different things and we're also doing the public program, we do Qigong, I guess that's an Asian, another way to bring Asia into the community.

So the labels, I think the exhibition policy currently says the labels are written for the interested adult, because we had to pick something, again we are going to look at is that really what we are doing, but I guess, so the labels you have to pitch it, actually I think interested adult is a fair enough comment, because they are, obviously we provide the tomb stone, what we call the tomb stone information so dates, locations, collection number if you want to find out more and you know anything about its production, and then the labels are very much, something we have to explain to our colleagues, they are very much written, that you can't just write one light label for an object because they interact with whatever's around it. And, from our non-collection side they keep saying why can't we just use that for everything, but because it won't make any sense, but if you are talking or looking at the cuneiform tablets, I was looking on the train today, but they all relate, so they all explain something in one, you then explain in detail what the seal is saying in another, but on its own.

Mary Redfern: Or you show a different page from the same manuscript, in which case it really doesn't work to use the same label.

Jessica Baldwin: So obviously the central panels, are the overall theme and those are the ones which are translated into Irish, and then the labels give you a bit more flexibility, but then we are also restrained with word count, because we have standardised labels, you'll see their either one block of text or two blocks of text so either way you have a maximum of a hundred words on a large one.

Mary Redfern: Just over one hundred.

Jessica Baldwin: And fifty obviously for a small label, so again I was editing some of Jill's and it's like, how do you get the whole Persian conquest into fifty words.

Mary Redfern: Trying to explain Tibetan Buddhist theories and then also say this is the signature of this king. It's yea, your trying to explain, but for me it's also about, I think it's good if a label can also make people not sort of see something then read the label and then move on but you see something you read the label and then you look again, so it brings you back to the object, so you look back up or you look at the next one. Sort of to deepen really the engagement, rather than just explaining something. So, you don't think well that's done now, but also I'm yea, it's fun writing labels, its challenging writing labels.

Interview with Kim Mawhinney (Head of Art at National Museums Northern Ireland)
Ulster Museum
Friday 15th March 2019
10.30 am

Note: The interviewee (Kim Mawhinney) had a printed version of the interview questions in front of her during the interview, in asking interview questions in many cases I was only prompting discussion surrounding the list.

What is your role in the museum and how did you become associated with the O'Neill Collection?

Ok, in 1995 I joined the Ulster Museum as a curator of applied art with the responsibilities of looking after the ceramics, glass and furniture collections. In 2009, I was appointed 'Head of Art' so I was in charge of and responsible for the overall art collections then here at National Museums NI.

To then focus on the display of the collection. What are the intendent messages or narratives told through this display?

It's a very specific display in so much that, in 2006 the Ulster Museum closed for three years and we reopened in 2009, now prior to that the museum only had two small galleries that were for the applied art collections, and that was for everything from silver, jewellery, ceramics, glass, furniture costume and textiles, and when the architects were looking at the building they wanted to put a new roof on it and they created this amazing space on the top floor of the Ulster Museum. The two galleries that we had had previously for the applied art collections were actually subsumed into the science galleries, which meant that there was nowhere really for us to display and anyway those two small galleries if we had costume out then there was no ceramics out, if we had ceramics out then there was no glass out, so it really limited what we could show to the public. With this new gallery display, in the George and Angela Moore who gave us one million dollars basically to fit out this space because it wasn't part of the original project money that we had. We were very keen that we would show a breadth of the collection, so there are various stand-alone cases, very large scale stand-alone cases, which we wanted to show the strengths of the collection, which are mostly eighteenth century and nineteenth century Irish material but also, we collect internationally important applied art, made by artists from across the world. We actively collect that every year. But one of the things which we wanted to highlight was the Sir Con O'Neill collection of Chinese ceramics, because it's such an important collection within the museum and we had acquired it in 2002 and it had only been out really in its entirety once in the past so we felt that it was such an important collection. But also, the design that we were doing in the gallery was so that students, art college students or researchers could come in and see the highlights of the collection but also it was very specifically designed as a teaching aid because, if you see where it is positioned, beside it you have blue and white delftware from Ireland from the 1750s, and it shows what was being made when the response of the Europeans to when they saw the Chinese porcelain coming in, imported into Europe. They couldn't understand how to make porcelain so they made delftware which mimicked it, and so that was important to make that

connection. But also, in the case beside it on the other side we have studio pottery from the late nineteenth century early twentieth century, where the studio potters had retaliated against the industrial revolution and wanted to go back to hand making and they even travelled to Japan and China to look at how the ancient Japanese, slightly more in particular, made their ceramics and a lot of it mimicked the early Chinese and Japanese shape and also the glazing techniques etc. so it makes this connection really from the old to the new and because that studio pottery is seen as the birth of contemporary ceramics it connects the two. So that's why it is a really important part of the gallery display.

How significant is the story of O'Neill then to the collection?

Well it was interesting because he was part of the O'Neill family from Lord Antrim, so Shanes Castle and that family, and he was a very important political civil servant and he went to Peking as it was the in the 1950s as the chargé de d'affaire so it would be like the equivalent of an ambassador and he would of you know China was still very closed to the public at that point, so he was able to work with the politics there and within Britain but also he had a love of objects and he collected a lot of material not just ceramics but there would have been manuscripts and paintings and ivories and jade and things like that. But because of his connection to Northern Ireland, when he came back he knew that the museum had some very minor pieces of Chinese ceramics in it, but he met the curator Arthur Dean at that time and suggested to him that he might want to make a selection from his large collection of ceramics, as a teaching collection to show the variety from the Sung (Song) dynasty right the way through to the Ming dynasty no sorry Qing dynasty, including five very important pieces of Yongle period Ming that he would lend on a long term basis. So, from the 1960s we had this thirty-ones pieces of ceramics in the collection, but they didn't belong to us. But the family then, his son Rowan O'Neill and his daughter Onora O'Neill who is a very distinguished academic decided that they were going to sell their fathers collection, the wider collection, and they gave us first refusal then on the pieces that we had here so it took a bit of fundraising etc. to acquire the pieces but we were able to buy them then and, the thirty-one pieces, it's interesting that at the time we had them insured as a loan into us at quite a high amount of money but in 2002 Chinese ceramics weren't actually very popular. So, the evaluations came in quite low and they agreed to that but now, you know Chinese ceramics are through the roof, its ridiculous amounts of money that go you know for the pieces now.

So, it is very deliberate then that he is still mentioned, and still a part of the collection?

Absolutely, we think it's very key, we certainty I do anyway, that if you bring in a collection that has been gathered by somebody that their name should still be associated with it because it's part of the legacy and its part of the history, you know of this particular person's choice of which objects he bought.

What role do the individual meanings of the objects have then?

With the new reopening of the museum in 2009, we had a total review of out interpretation and we had very much a view that we wouldn't be putting textbooks on walls anymore, because we know from research that the public just don't read

lengthy labels or long texts. So, we had a standard text sort of format, so we wrote everything all the text panels etc. are written in the same way at that time, so we were limited by numbers etc. and also with the Chinese ceramics we don't go into great depth about each of the pieces it's just really telling you, you know what it is what it's made from and the date and you know what period they had come from within a dynasty.

Is the placement of the objects significant then, are they purposefully grouped together in colour coordination?

Well yes, when we were redesigning this whole space, or sorry designing this whole space for the first time, these cases were really quite unique in fact the Click Netherfield who designed these, it was the first time they had used this non-metal structure to hold the roof up so you can see there's no uprights in these it's the glass itself that's holding them up so it was really a new way of displaying to see as much glass around something as possible, so you weren't getting distracted by the view. Now with this particular case, you can see across all the other cases that there's a highlight colour in each of them, and it's all quite subtle it's not very brash or garish and we used this Chinese red to show off in particular the blue and white and it is a very distinct Chinese red that would be known as a Chinese red colour, and the rest of the plinths in the case are like a beige grey. So, the designer and myself really made that conscious decision that we wanted that Chinese red because it did speak also of that. But your absolutely right, when a curator is looking at the objects, we wanted because these cases are in the 360 round we had to think of each of the views for each of the different sides. So, there isn't really, is not a timeline in any shape or form, it's basically positioned for their aesthetic appeal. In saying that there are a few things that we put together, for instance those three celadon pieces are together, just to show how people carved into the celadon clay, or sorry carved into the clay and then put on the celadon glaze, that's where you see the pattern. The yellow pieces are Ming dynasty and we turned them upside-down so that you could see the actual marks, because people always talk about Chinese marks and I thought that it was important that you actually saw those marks and you could see that they were two different periods. And also, the blue Qing dynasty pieces, we had a lot of those and I wanted to show the subtle differences, and also the fact ones turned upside-down because there's an inscribed poem on the base of one of the pots as well. The fact that the blue and white pieces are at the top is to do with their importance, ok. And the fact that people who would be knowledgeable about Chinese ceramics would automatically recognise those as being the most valuable and the most important. It is the spotlight, so even in all the other cases that you see in the gallery, like that big tall piece of glass is a really spectacular piece of Irish glass so it's the centre point, so the blue and the centre point.

The glass case is quite deliberate even lighting then?

Yes, it's funny because this gallery looks best in the dark. So at night and in the winter from about three o'clock on because we have this, what's called celestial lighting around which gives daylight and this gallery is actually very dramatically lit, but you don't see it until its dark outside and then you get, like that piece of glass actually sparkles practically as you walk around it so you can't see that in day, and we didn't know that actually when we were designing it, so these things just happen.

So, everything was done as a process with yourself and a designer then?

Yes, we had as I said this text template that for text panels in all the galleries when we reopened, you know you were only allowed one sentence to start off with, two sentences in the next paragraph and then you know maybe up to seventy words in the next one, so 150 words in total for the whole thing so it was quite challenging for a lot of the curators because we are used to wanting to tell everybody everything that we know so we had to be very restrained, but in saying that once you got into the hang of it, it was brilliant and everybody loved doing it so we do it now naturally we don't even think about it we just do it. You know, we know that first sentence has to be the essence of what your trying to say and if people really wanted to read more they can read the next two paragraphs, but if they are just fleetingly going through at least they may have picked up something from that first sentence. You could write, you know, textbooks on all of those pieces practically so.

Was anything else looked at for inspiration then when you were putting together this display?
What we do, as sort of a national museum curator, even now, like I was in London last week I saw the Dior exhibition, we constantly try to update out design and our you know, looking at other exhibitions so that we get inspiration. These cases, because nobody else had cases like this, it was quite different, but it didn't stop us I mean we would have had a look at some of the applied art new designed galleries. There was one in Liverpool, there was one in Birmingham and one in Manchester, so we did travel around to look at you know what people were doing with modern museum design. Because, you know, before you know like twenty years ago, these would probably have been covered in fabric and would have looked really dated and you know we would have had big labels for each piece sitting beside it, whereas really, it's the actual ceramics that your seeing and the text is very secondary.

I guess the audience then, was there anyone in particular that this display was designed for, I know you previously mentioned students? Was that the key audience that you had in mind?

Yes, it was the key audience that I had in mind, because one of the decisions that was taken when we were closed was that the curators wouldn't move back to here as well as the collections wouldn't move back here. Which meant that I would have had the first-year ceramics students in with me every year, into my store that had all the collection here, so I would have done that sort of teaching exercise with them, with the objects handling them, letting them see them, so I was removed from the building as were the collections. So, I needed something that the ceramic tutors could bring the students up and do what I was doing, or I would do it with them and I do, do tours with students around this gallery because there's so much inspirational pieces in it, across all the different media as well.

What do you hope that visitors will pick up on then?

Well we have a variety of audiences, ok, we have a repeat visitor who knows the Ulster Museum really well, and loves to see things that they really like every time they come. So, the fact that it is consistently on display, there are people that will see

it and go yes, I love those. The students is another audience, and academics and researchers, so that is really important to us that we are seen as an inspiring place for them to visit. The other one is tourists, because tourists we have a much larger tourist population coming to Belfast and also it shows that we have absolutely amazing collections by putting out something that is so fabulously rare and beautiful, that they see that the Ulster Museum you know isn't just talking about the history of Ulster or the history of Belfast, that it is actually showing the wold in context, so that's another type of visitor that I would hope would get something from seeing these on the gallery.

On a final point, I would just like to know if community initiatives have ever played a role with the collection? Or is this something that maybe you hope to do in the future?

It was actually something that I hoped to do when we acquired the pieces, I reached out to the Chinese community and tried to get them in to see the pieces when we got them in 2002, and maybe I should have perused it more, it could well be my fault, but to be honest I didn't really get the connection there that I hoped that I would. In saying that now, when Chinese visitors come to the museum, especially like VIP's etcetera that we've had some really high-profile women politicians, in fact the second in command of China was here, and they knew exactly how important those ceramics were, they were like oh wow you have these here, you know. The other thing is that I have recently now reached back out to the Chinese community, I curated a Chinese painting exhibition, and now that we have that audience I'd hope that, or not that I have that audience, now that I have that connection with the Chinese Welfare Association, they have an art club, that it would be great for them to come in and see this. Although, they are very much interested in painting at the minute but hopefully we'll be able to do more and get them involved with the ceramics.

Appendix B: Visitor Interview Transcriptions and Observations

Visitor Interview Question Sheets

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this exhibition?

2. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

4. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

5. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

Please initial:
(to confirm that this information can be used anonymously within a PhD research project)

National Museum of Ireland (A Dubliner's Collection of Asian Art: The Albert Bender Exhibition)
Sunday 10th February 2019
1pm-4.45pm

Visitor numbers (not including children): approx. 112 individuals walked through the Albert Bender collection. Out of this number, 11 individuals agreed to an interview.

Observations:

- The majority of museum visitors (approx. 80 out of 112) entered the Bender exhibition from the exit, therefore many visitors I spoke with did not pick up the context of this exhibition as they viewed the text regarding Albert Bender last.

- A large number of museum visitors (especially those with children) just walked through this exhibit and did not take a close look at the objects displayed, and consequently did not agree to discuss this exhibition.

Visitor 1

6. Have you enjoyed visiting this exhibition?

   Yes

7. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   Japanese prints and thangkas, I am a graphic artist and find them good inspiration.

8. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   Skipped over the text to be honest.

9. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   Bender. Would be nice to see more about the objects as the cultural history is not really included.

10. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

    Yes, suitable for all. I will be back with my son who is a very different age from me, and also a graphic artist who might be inspired.

Visitor 2

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this exhibition?

   Yes.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   None really.

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   Bender/ Japan.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   Bender/ Japan.

5. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   All ages. Pity that the [interpretative material] screen and stamp press not working though.

Visitor 3

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this exhibition?

   Yes.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   Tapestries.

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   Japan.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   Japanese.

5. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   My mother (older generation).

Visitor 4

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this exhibition?

   Yes.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   Thangkas/ Japanese paintings by Katsukaua Shuzan.

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

Design elements are what is standing out for me. My own interests coming through.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   China/ Dalai Lama.

5. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   Family and friends.

Visitor 5

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this exhibition?

   Yes.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   The carving.

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   Early China.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   Bender.

5. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   Loads of people.

Visitor 6

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this exhibition?

   Yes.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   Japanese prints/ silk prints.

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   Story of Bender's life.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   Bender.

5. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   Everyone.

   Signage/ floor signs are confusing. More floor signs/ general signage needed throughout the museum because it is hard to find this exhibit.

Visitor 7

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this exhibition?

   Yes.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   Japanese Daoist robe.

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   China/ Japan.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   Bender.

5. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   Suitable for everyone.

Visitor 8

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this exhibition?

   Yes.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   Snuff bottles.

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   Albert Bender (very like Chester Beatty museum).

4. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   Albert Bender/ China.

5. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

People who like Asian art.

I have problems with my vision and I find some of the signage too small or too low; larger, higher text would be nice.

Visitor 9

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this exhibition?

   Yes, good for a windy/ rainy day.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   All beautiful.

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   China/ Albert Bender.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   Albert Bender.

5. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   Anyone.

Visitor 10

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this exhibition?

   Yes.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   The robe (Daoist priest robe).

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   Chinese history/ Bender's life story.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   Bender.

5. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   Anyone.

Visitor 11

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this exhibition?

   Yes.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   Silk paintings.

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   Chinese history.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   China.

5. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   Anyone interested in China.

The Hunt Museum (East Asian Ceramic Collection)
Saturday 6th April 2019

Notes: On the day I had arranged to carry out visitor interviews in the Hunt Museum, the Captain's Room (where the museum's East Asian ceramic collection is currently displayed) was already in use for an event the entire day. Therefore, unlike the other cases, these interviews were not conducted by myself and instead were carried out by museum docents. As a result of the double-booked room, museum docents instead carried out the interviews on my behalf later in the week. Because of this many of the responses are not relevant as there was a bit of confusion among the museum's volunteers surrounding what objects/ part of the collection the interviews were investigating. However, many of the responses are still very useful and allow insight into how both museum visitors and volunteers perceive this collection.

Visitor 1

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this display?

   Yes.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this display?

   Large pug dogs. I have a pet dog.

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel this display is telling?

   The time the collection was assembled and the building itself.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this display (individuals/groups/cultures)?

   The Hunt family.

5. Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

   Something for everyone, things for all ages.

Visitor 2

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this display?

   Yes.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this display?

   I find the drawers the most memorable part of visiting the Hunt.

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel this display is telling?

   It's telling the story of the Hunt family and the objects together.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this display (individuals/groups/cultures)?

   A broad mixture across cultures, but originally I thought they were mostly European until looking closer.

5. Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

   I think a broad range of people would enjoy the display, but I feel that mostly academics and collectors would truly appreciate it. For the general public I think the interpretation is very minimal.

Visitor 3

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this display?

   Yes.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this display?

   Plate- Delftware, Irish.

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel this display is telling?

   Dublin craft makers.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this display (individuals/groups/cultures)?

   Dublin craft makers.

5. Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

   Whoever likes washing dishes.

Visitor 4

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this display?

   Yes.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this display?

   The plates from the 18th Century depicting castles.

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel this display is telling?

   Story of the wealth and yet functionality/ use. Style of the time flow through this cabinet.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this display (individuals/groups/cultures)?

Individual family preference.

5. Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

   Most.

Visitor 5

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this display?

   Yes.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this display?

   Wine ewer.

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel this display is telling?

   Fashion/ style.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this display (individuals/groups/cultures)?

   Chinese culture.

5. Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

   People of all ages.

Visitor 6

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this display?

   Yes.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this display?

   Puppy and kitten figurines.

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel this display is telling?

   I often saw the good luck cat figure in Asian restaurants but didn't know the history of the cat with the raised paw until now.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this display (individuals/groups/cultures)?

   Asian ceramic artists.

5. Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

Everyone.

Visitor 7

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this display?

   Yes.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this display?

   Sweetmeat dish in the form of a hare.

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel this display is telling?

   Story of how ‘china’ – word for crockery came about.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this display (individuals/groups/cultures)?

   Chinese culture

5. Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

   Something for everyone.

Visitor 8

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this display?

   Yes, very much.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this display?

   Guilt mounted Chinese bowl.

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel this display is telling?

   It struck me that there is great symmetry in how it connects everyone and Asia, and that process of connection is taking place again.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this display (individuals/groups/cultures)?

   Chinese.

5. Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

   Anyone with some interest in Asian aesthetics.

Visitor 9

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this display?

   Very much so.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this display?

   Raqqai bowl.

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel this display is telling?

   Simplicity and domestic use of ceramics.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this display (individuals/groups/cultures)?

   Syrian culture

5. Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

   Everyone, these is something for everybody.

Visitor 10

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this display?

   Yes, very much.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this display?

   Sweetmeat dish.

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel this display is telling?

   Asian culture.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this display (individuals/groups/cultures)?

   Chinese culture.

5. Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

   Children and adults alike, everyone!

Visitor 11

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this display?

   Yes.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this display?

   Tea bowls

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel this display is telling?

   Japanese tea ceremony.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this display (individuals/groups/cultures)?

   Cultures.

5. Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

   Everyone.

Visitor 12

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this display?

   Yes.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this display?

   Kundika.

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel this display is telling?

   The connections between Europe and Asia. The development of these connections. The development of designs, colours and techniques. The story of ceramics.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this display (individuals/groups/cultures)?

   Many Asian cultures- Japanese, Chinese and their relationships with other countries.

5. Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

   Anyone with a particular interest in a wide range of ceramics, ceramics development and the relationships developed through ceramics. In general anyone interested in material culture history and people.

Visitor 13

1. Have you enjoyed visiting this display?

   Yes.

2. What object do you find most memorable from this display?

Lord Charlemont's dish service.

3. What story or aspects of history do you feel this display is telling?

   History of the blue and white ceramics.

4. Who do you feel is represented by this display (individuals/groups/cultures)?

   Artists developments of ceramics.

5. Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

   Everyone.

Chester Beatty Library (Arts of the Book Exhibition)
Saturday 23rd March 2019
11.30am-4.30pm

Observations: This was the busiest site I have visited to so far (compared to the Ulster Museum and National Museum of Ireland), nevertheless a large proportion of visitors did not want to stop and participate in the survey. Many visitors also belonged to tour groups so did not have the time to stop and participate. Furthermore, as the East Asian collection is integrated alongside other objects with divergent cultural origins it was much more difficult to gather information on this collection specifically. Seventeen museum visitors participated in this survey.

Note: During this visitor interview session, the questions altered slightly from the other case studies, as the Chester Beatty Library requested additional questions to be added. This granted the museum the ability to also benefit from the interview research conducted. The additional questions focussed on gathering a general demographic of the types of visitors entering the museum, alongside information surrounding the overall experience of their visit. The Chester Beatty Library added in five of their own questions also changing the wording on my own first question; 'have you enjoyed visiting this display?' instead to 'how would you rate your overall experience at the Chester Beatty today?'.

The responses to these additional questions were solely for the benefit of the museum, and were not examined within this PhD. If this additional data was utilised the analysis would become unequal and disproportionate across the four case studies, with additional information gathered in this case. Adding questions to this case study is most likely the reason why it was more difficult in this case to engage with visitors. The longer list of questions persuaded the majority of visitors who did stop to participate to say no to answering them. However, this factor was unavoidable, adding further questions enabled the museum to agree to allowing this research project to be conducted.

Visitor 1

1. Where did you hear about the Chester Beatty?

   Online.

2. Would you recommend our exhibitions to your friends?

   Yes

3. How would you rate your overall experience at the Chester Beatty today?

   Good

4. Have you had a chance to view the East Asian collection on display?

   No.

5. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   [No answer given].

6. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   [No answer given].

7. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   [No answer given].

8. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   [No answer given].

9. Are you? Male Female

10. Which of the following age brands matches your age?
    Under 16 16 to 19 20 to 32 33 to 45 46 to 64 65+

Visitor 2

1. Where did you hear about the Chester Beatty?

   Word of mouth.

2. Would you recommend our exhibitions to your friends?

   Yes.

3. How would you rate your overall experience at the Chester Beatty today?

   9/10.

4. Have you had a chance to view the East Asian collection on display?

   Yes.

5. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   Robe and scrolls.

6. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   East Asian.

7. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

East Asian.

8. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   Immigrants.

9. Are you? Male Female

10. Which of the following age brands matches your age?
    Under 16 16 to 19 20 to 32 33 to 45 46 to 64 65+

Visitor 3

1. Where did you hear about the Chester Beatty?

   Tourist information.

2. Would you recommend our exhibitions to your friends?

   Yes.

3. How would you rate your overall experience at the Chester Beatty today?

   9/10 (because the text is too small).

4. Have you had a chance to view the East Asian collection on display?
   Yes.

5. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   None.

6. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   Different countries.

7. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   Countries objects are from.

8. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   Tourists.

9. Are you? Male Female

10. Which of the following age brands matches your age?
    Under 16 16 to 19 20 to 32 33 to 45 46 to 64 65+

Visitor 4

1. Where did you hear about the Chester Beatty?

   Advertisement.

2. Would you recommend our exhibitions to your friends?

   Yes.

3. How would you rate your overall experience at the Chester Beatty today?

   Ok.

4. Have you had a chance to view the East Asian collection on display?

   Yes.

5. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   The robe.

6. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   Each of the countries.

7. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   Countries/ Chester Beatty.

8. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   Anyone.

9. Are you? Male Female

10. Which of the following age brands matches your age?
    Under 16 16 to 19 20 to 32 33 to 45 46 to 64 65+

Visitor 5

1. Where did you hear about the Chester Beatty?

   Tourist guide.

2. Would you recommend our exhibitions to your friends?

   Sure.

3. How would you rate your overall experience at the Chester Beatty today?

9/10.

4. Have you had a chance to view the East Asian collection on display?

   Yes.

5. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   Would like to see more context around Beatty and how he relates to the objects.

6. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   Needs more about Beatty and more context.

7. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   Each of the countries.

8. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   Everyone aged teen → older. Not for kids and younger people would need more context.

9. Are you? Male Female

10. Which of the following age brands matches your age?
    Under 16 16 to 19 20 to 32 33 to 45 46 to 64 65+

Visitor 6

1. Where did you hear about the Chester Beatty?

   Word of mouth.

2. Would you recommend our exhibitions to your friends?

   Yes.

3. How would you rate your overall experience at the Chester Beatty today?

   7/10 (didn't understand some things).

4. Have you had a chance to view the East Asian collection on display?

   Yes.

5. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   Robe.

6. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   Seen the stories on scrolls.

7. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   Not enough about Beatty.

8. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   Older/ adults.

9. Are you? Male Female

10. Which of the following age brands matches your age?
    Under 16 16 to 19 20 to 32 33 to 45 46 to 64 65+

Visitor 7

1. Where did you hear about the Chester Beatty?

   Tour group.

2. Would you recommend our exhibitions to your friends?

   Yes.

3. How would you rate your overall experience at the Chester Beatty today?

   8/10.

4. Have you had a chance to view the East Asian collection on display?

   Yes.

5. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   Snuff bottles.

6. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   Beatty.

7. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   Beatty, because he put together the collection.

8. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   All people.

9. Are you? Male Female

10. Which of the following age brands matches your age?
    Under 16 16 to 19 20 to 32 33 to 45 46 to 64 65+

Visitor 8

1. Where did you hear about the Chester Beatty?

   Tour.

2. Would you recommend our exhibitions to your friends?

   Yes.

3. How would you rate your overall experience at the Chester Beatty today?

   Ok.

4. Have you had a chance to view the East Asian collection on display?

   No.

5. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   [No answer given].

6. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   [No answer given].

7. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   [No answer given].

8. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   [No answer given].

9. Are you? Male Female

10. Which of the following age brands matches your age?
    Under 16 16 to 19 20 to 32 33 to 45 46 to 64 65+

Visitor 9

1. Where did you hear about the Chester Beatty?

   Word of mouth.

2. Would you recommend our exhibitions to your friends?

   Yes.

3. How would you rate your overall experience at the Chester Beatty today?

   9/10.

4. Have you had a chance to view the East Asian collection on display?

   Yes.

5. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   Jade books, snuff bottles and Japanese scroll.

6. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   Chester Beatty.

7. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   Chester Beatty.

8. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   All.

9. Are you? Male Female

10. Which of the following age brands matches your age?
    Under 16 16 to 19 20 to 32 33 to 45 46 to 64 65+

Visitor 10

1. Where did you hear about the Chester Beatty?

   Word of mouth.

2. Would you recommend our exhibitions to your friends?

   Yes.

3. How would you rate your overall experience at the Chester Beatty today?

10/10 (visit often).

4. Have you had a chance to view the East Asian collection on display?

   Yes.

5. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   Scrolls.

6. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   The background of the objects.

7. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   Different countries.

8. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   People interested.

9. Are you? Male Female

10. Which of the following age brands matches your age?
    Under 16 16 to 19 20 to 32 33 to 45 46 to 64 65+

Visitor 11

1. Where did you hear about the Chester Beatty?

   Visitor information.

2. Would you recommend our exhibitions to your friends?

   Yes.

3. How would you rate your overall experience at the Chester Beatty today?

   Good.

4. Have you had a chance to view the East Asian collection on display?

   Yes.

5. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   The robe.

6. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   History of countries.

7. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   Chester Beatty.

8. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   Anyone.

9. Are you? Male Female

10. Which of the following age brands matches your age?
    Under 16 16 to 19 20 to 32 33 to 45 46 to 64 65+

Visitor 12

1. Where did you hear about the Chester Beatty?

   Guide.

2. Would you recommend our exhibitions to your friends?

   Yes.

3. How would you rate your overall experience at the Chester Beatty today?

   7/10.

4. Have you had a chance to view the East Asian collection on display?

   Yes.

5. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   Robe and Egyptian objects.

6. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   Chester Beatty.

7. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   Chester Beatty.

8. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

Adults.

9. Are you? Male Female

10. Which of the following age brands matches your age?
Under 16 16 to 19 20 to 32 33 to 45 46 to 64 65+

Visitor 13

1. Where did you hear about the Chester Beatty?

   Live here (in Dublin) so just know.

2. Would you recommend our exhibitions to your friends?

   Yes.

3. How would you rate your overall experience at the Chester Beatty today?

   10/10 (visited many times).

4. Have you had a chance to view the East Asian collection on display?

   Yes.

5. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   Scrolls.

6. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   Chester Beatty and the countries the objects are from.

7. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   Chester Beatty.

8. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   Adults.

9. Are you? Male Female

10. Which of the following age brands matches your age?
Under 16 16 to 19 20 to 32 33 to 45 46 to 64 65+

Visitor 14

1. Where did you hear about the Chester Beatty?

Knew of it.

2. Would you recommend our exhibitions to your friends?

   Yes.

3. How would you rate your overall experience at the Chester Beatty today?

   Never disappoints.

4. Have you had a chance to view the East Asian collection on display?

   Yes.

5. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   Japanese scrolls.

6. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   The art and culture of a privileged class.

7. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   Beatty's love of his collection and culture itself.

8. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   10 and above but all ages could visit. Although exhibits are high for children.

9. Are you? Male Female

10. Which of the following age brands matches your age?
    Under 16 16 to 19 20 to 32 33 to 45 46 to 64 65+

Visitor 15

1. Where did you hear about the Chester Beatty?

   Don't know.

2. Would you recommend our exhibitions to your friends?

   Yes.

3. How would you rate your overall experience at the Chester Beatty today?

   Yes.

4. Have you had a chance to view the East Asian collection on display?

   Yes.

5. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   No.

6. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   No.

7. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   No.

8. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   [No answer given].

9. Are you? Male Female

10. Which of the following age brands matches your age?
    Under 16 16 to 19 20 to 32 33 to 45 46 to 64 65+

Visitor 16

1. Where did you hear about the Chester Beatty?

   Word of mouth.

2. Would you recommend our exhibitions to your friends?

   Yes.

3. How would you rate your overall experience at the Chester Beatty today?

   10/10

4. Have you had a chance to view the East Asian collection on display?

   Yes.

5. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   Wood print from 1950s. Koran. Info on pigment given is very good/ interesting.

6. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   Small narratives told about each object.

7. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   Individual cultures. Chester Beatty/ bit of his taste.

8. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   People with and interest (very specialist).

9. Are you? Male Female (two individuals interviewed).

10. Which of the following age brands matches your age?
    Under 16 16 to 19 20 to 32 33 to 45 46 to 64 65+

Visitor 17

1. Where did you hear about the Chester Beatty?

   I love it, always interesting.

2. Would you recommend our exhibitions to your friends?

   Yes.

3. How would you rate your overall experience at the Chester Beatty today?

   10/10 (friends would like).

4. Have you had a chance to view the East Asian collection on display?

   No.

5. What object do you find most memorable from this exhibition?

   None.

6. What story or aspects of history do you feel that this exhibition is telling?

   None.

7. Who do you feel is represented by this exhibition?

   No one.

8. Who do you feel would enjoy this exhibition the most?

   Always recommend.

9. Are you? Male Female

10. Which of the following age brands matches your age?
    Under 16 16 to 19 20 to 32 33 to 45 46 to 64 65+

Ulster Museum (O'Neill collection of East Asian ceramics)
Sunday 27th January 2019
11am-4.30pm

Visitor numbers (not including children); approx. 338 individuals passed by the O'Neill collection (twice; on their way into and out of the exhibition space and children's art room on this floor). Out of this number, only twelve visitors stopped to look at the O'Neill collection, eleven of these individuals agreed to an interview.

Visitor 1

- Have you enjoyed Visiting this display?

  Yes, I come to the museum often.

- What object did you find most memorable form this display?

  Object seven because of its yellow colour (Ching dynasty bowl).

- What story or aspects of history do you feel that the museum is telling?

  A selection of the objects within the museum's collection.

- Who do you feel is represented by this display?

  The curators who assembled the collection from the museums objects.

- Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

  We do, we always come [to the museum] to see beautiful objects.

  But the height of the display is not correct for a wheelchair user like myself, I cannot get a good view of all the objects. This could be easily fixed by putting a piece of mirror on top of the case so I can see the reflection.

Visitor 2

- Have you enjoyed Visiting this display?

  Yes, we are visiting form Holland.
  We have just arrived at the museum and this is one of the first things we've saw.

- What object did you find most memorable form this display?

  Object 11 because of the colours and shape, similar to a popular dish at home (Ching dynasty porcelain bowl).

- What story or aspects of history do you feel that the museum is telling?

Can see connections between Chinese blue and white pieces and delftware from Holland.

Blue colour is similar to dishes at home.

- Who do you feel is represented by this display?

  Holland, China, Ireland.

  Happy that we have found a little bit of home.

- Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

  Tourists like us.

Visitor 3

- Have you enjoyed Visiting this display?

  Yes.
  But, seems people were in awe of the collection when it was first open to the public but not anymore.

- What object did you find most memorable form this display?

  Object 10, earthenware vase.

- What story or aspects of history do you feel that the museum is telling?

  More about O'Neill's collection than has vases/ objects.

- Who do you feel is represented by this display?

  O'Neill

- Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

  No one.

Visitor 4

- Have you enjoyed Visiting this display?

  Worst lit display [spotlight out].

  Paper lying on top of display case.

- What object did you find most memorable form this display?

  Object 6, never seen anything like it (Ming dynasty vase).

- What story or aspects of history do you feel that the museum is telling?

  Chinese history.

- Who do you feel is represented by this display?

  O'Neill.

  China.

- Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

  People over 40.

Visitor 5

- Have you enjoyed Visiting this display?

  Yes, I didn't know that China had porcelain 8,000 years before the West.

- What object did you find most memorable form this display?

  Object 1, drawn to first object at top (Ming dynasty blue and white plate).

- What story or aspects of history do you feel that the museum is telling?

  History of Chinese porcelain.

- Who do you feel is represented by this display?

  O'Neill

  Chinese porcelain makers.

- Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

  People with an interest in Chinese artefacts.

Visitor 6

- Have you enjoyed Visiting this display?

  Yes.

- What object did you find most memorable form this display?

  Objects 9-11, remind [visitor] of English pottery.

- What story or aspects of history do you feel that the museum is telling?

[Display] not associated enough with China.

[Objects] quite heavy.

Surprised at the lack of colour [in objects].

[In display] no sense of where objects are from.

- Who do you feel is represented by this display?
  Not China seems more like Europe/ European objects also displayed.

- Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

  Visitors.

Visitor 7

- Have you enjoyed Visiting this display?

  Yes, I am an artist so I visit often.

- What object did you find most memorable form this display?

  Object 17, it is so contemporary (Sung period bowl).

  [In the display] it is overlooked how amazing this object is, it is so contemporary for something so ancient.

  Would like to see more info about individual objects.

- What story or aspects of history do you feel that the museum is telling?

  O'Neill.

  Chinese Potters.

- Who do you feel is represented by this display?

  O'Neill.

  Chinese potters.

  The mindfulness and zen of Chinese craft that the majority of people don't pay attention to.

  Would like to see more aspects of history represented in ceramics (30s, 40, 50s).

  Would like to see more ceramics collections/ wider representation in general.

Would like to see more history of the objects and connections between the objects.

Would like the craft (Chinese potters) to be represented more.

- Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

  People don't appreciate ceramics enough.

  Too much emphasis [in the museum] on blockbuster exhibits.

  Sad that this display/ ceramics in general are not a bigger focus, really taken for granted.

Visitor 8

- Have you enjoyed Visiting this display?

  Perfectly fine.

- What object did you find most memorable form this display?

  Object 10 (earthenware).

- What story or aspects of history do you feel that the museum is telling?

  Chinese ceramics.

  Nothing to match objects to time frame.
  The number system makes it hard to match dates to objects.

  Number system is awkward

  Too much about collector and not individual periods in history.

- Who do you feel is represented by this display?

  O'Neill.

  Not a lot of information given on individual objects.

  Hard to tell what the story is rather than just a collection.

  Not sure why it is important.

  Labels don't give enough information.

- Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

People with an interest in ceramics.

Visitor 9

- Have you enjoyed Visiting this display?

  It's ok.
  Just out for the day, more of an interest in glass.

- What object did you find most memorable form this display?

  Generally interested in porcelain.

  Object 11, nice. (Yuan vase).

- What story or aspects of history do you feel that the museum is telling?

  Chinese porcelain.

- Who do you feel is represented by this display?

  China.

- Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

  People out for the day.

Visitor 10

- Have you enjoyed Visiting this display?

  Dates confuse me a lot.
  No dates in general info.

- What object did you find most memorable form this display?

  Objects 7 and 8 because of yellow colour (Sung period bowls).

  5 incense burner interesting shape (Southern Sung tea bowl).

- What story or aspects of history do you feel that the museum is telling?

  Context of Europe. The Western collector.
  Objects put in unusual context.

- Who do you feel is represented by this display?

  O'Neill.

  So much history not represented.

Colonial feel.

Not much depth [in display].

Display disjointed with other objects on display. Not much connection between everything else.

- Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

  Someone who enjoys porcelain

  Older person thing.

  Art students.

Visitor 11

- Have you enjoyed Visiting this display?

  Yes. I like pottery in general.
- What object did you find most memorable form this display?

  The blue and white, like Dutch pottery [refers to Irish delftware also displayed].

- What story or aspects of history do you feel that the museum is telling?

  China.

  O'Neill.

- Who do you feel is represented by this display?

  China.

  Europe/ like delftware.

  Just moved here from Netherlands and I like the way it reminds me of Dutch delft.

- Who do you feel would enjoy visiting this display the most?

  My mum (non-art enjoyer), older generation.

  Me, someone who enjoys art.